JAFAR TUKAN

Ali Abu Ghanimeh
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ARCHITECTURE

LIBRIA

Jordan is an extraordinary country that takes its name from the sacred river that meanders through and fertilises its fields, a wedge of land that humankind began to inhabit the minute it "learnt the secrets of how to grow wheat and tame animals", as Fernand Braudel puts it. Here there is ample evidence of a multifaceted expression of contemporary architecture. Only two names, however, stand out in the international arena of architectural debate: those of Jafar Tukan, and of Rasem Badran.

Jafar Tukan, native of Jerusalem, was born in 1938 but grew up in Nablus where his family originally came from. Both towns were to exercise a positive and lasting influence on the architect, conjuring up childhood memories as poignant as Proust's madeleines, and he frequently goes back to visit.

Pursuing a path of research that carefully avoided the superficial clichés usually applied to Arab contemporary architecture, Tukan designed buildings that hinted of international style whilst maintaining the expression of native emotions deeply rooted in their environment. The influence of his work, spread out like patches here and there over Amman, began to make itself felt and contributed to the architectural renewal of this ancient city.

Remembering the smells and the sensations produced by jasmine-covered walls, the balance between green spaces and buildings, the rich flavours of this city and of other cities of the Arab world, I cannot help thinking that the Arab culture brings a special contribution to the world. Of course, every people has its own traditions that cannot be cancelled by the process of globalisation. I am deeply convinced that the culture expressed by the Jordanians, through people like Jafar Tukan as regards architecture, represents a wealth for all mankind, a gift to the world, to all those who can and want to appreciate it, convinced that *post tenebra lux*.

ا/ الاستاذ الدكتور محمد عبد الباقي ابراهيم

مع تحياتي واجلالي لدور عائلتكم في

صنع جيل من الشباب يتلمذون على

اياديكم فشكراً لكم.

ا.د. علي ابو غنيمة

القاهرة ٢٠١٤

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Samir Saddi

Foreword

"The building as architecture is born out of the heart of man, permanent consort to the ground, comrade to the trees, true reflection of man in the realm of his own spirit.
His building is therefore consecrated space wherein he seeks refuge, recreation and repose for the body but especially for the mind. So our machine-age building need no more look like machinery than machinery need look like a building."

Frank Lloyd Wright

Jordan is an extraordinary country that takes its name from the sacred river that meanders through and fertilises its fields, a wedge of land that humankind began to inhabit the minute it "learnt the secrets of how to grow wheat and tame animals", as Fernand Braudel puts it. Here there is ample evidence of a multifaceted expression of contemporary architecture. Only two names, however, stand out in the international arena of architectural debate: those of Jafar Tukan, and of Rasem Badran.

It is they who represent the two poles of Jordan's most advanced and stimulating architectural research.

Badran was born in Jerusalem in 1945 and graduated from Germany's Darmstadt University in 1970. He is best known in Amman for his Villa Handal (1974), Villa Hajjar (1983) and the Private Police Forces Building (1982), and in Riyad, Saudi Arabia for the Qasr-Al-Hokm Mosque (1985). He lives and works in Amman, where he founded the Shubeilat Badran Associates Studio. His drawings for various museums have appeared in many international magazines and have caught the appreciative attention of those in the know with his knack for reinterpreting Islamic tradition in a stimulating and innovative fashion without falling prey to the need for novelty of expression at all costs as witnessed in so many other countries.

Another native of Jerusalem, Jafar Tukan was born in 1938 but grew up in Nablus where his family was originally from. Both towns were to exercise a positive and lasting influence on the architect, conjuring up childhood memories as poignant as Proust's madeleines; he still goes back to visit frequently.

For a recent conference held at Bellagio, on Lake Como, Jafar Tukan wrote: "The images that cross my mind of Jerusalem in the years preceding 1948 are of happy memories. The rocking-horses at Freeman's, a Jewish shoe shop on Ben Yehuda Street, Zananiri's toy shop in Mamila run by a Christian, and an array of sweet shops in the old town run by Muslims. We wandered freely all over Jerusalem and in those days the Rex Cinema was considered an avant-garde building, an example of modern technology".

Nevertheless, we think of the words of Jacques Berque in his intensely-styled essay "The Arabs: Original Characteristics and the Search for Identity" would equally apply to Jafar Tukan's concept of a city: ".... the urbanness profoundly inherent in Islam takes its cue from the fundamental dialectic choice of the desert: the dynamism of nomadism on the one hand, and the call of the oasis on the other. What we see is the refusal to give in to any kind of subjugation — not even to regularity — and a contempt for riches that are too easy to be had; at the same time we see how a love of invariance and an avid sense of possession mutate through sensual dissipation into the desire for absolute nakedness."

Jafar lost his father, the famous poet Ibrahim Tukan, when he was only three. His aunt Fadwa was also a poet whose fame spread well beyond the boundaries of the Arab world. With her many lyrical poems she spoke for women, she spoke for civil rights and she spoke for humanity, giving voice to the feelings of a people forced to undergo the injustice of oppression.

We feel the following is a particularly significant poem of hers called "Happy in its Womb":

I shall be glad and happy to die
In my own country,
To be buried and dissolved
Beneath my own land.

One day I shall rise again as some kind of grass
Or flower that will be gently stroked
By the small hands of a little boy from my country.

Happy and satisfied will I be to linger on,
No matter if only as some kind of grass
Or flower,
Within the womb of my country!

After finishing school, Tukan moved to Lebanon to complete his studies, graduating in architecture from the American University of Beirut in 1960.

Thanks to Lebanon's being the most forward-looking and economically developed country of the Arabic-speaking world, he got to know, and be influenced by, various avant-garde architectural movements from around the world. He also established deep ties of friendship with Raymond Ghùsson, one of his professors who had been lucky enough to study under Walter Gropius.

Before 1973 Lebanon was a country that felt strong ties with Europe and this in itself made it easier than elsewhere in the region for a fusion of Arabic/Western culture to take place in the fields of art and architecture.

In Jordan, for instance, there was no comparable group of intellectuals to keep up a debate of ideas. Things have progressed considerably since, largely due to the widespread increase in average income and a greater access, therefore, to university studies. At the time, however, things seemed backward to this young architect who had been trained in the peculiarly Lebanese ambiance.

Upon his graduation Tukan set himself up in Amman, but only for one year (1960); his post at the Ministry of Public Affairs was not stimulating enough to hold him there. He returned to Beirut in 1961 and remained until 1976 making the most of the opportunity to consolidate his skills. Tukan was not one to cut corners and he gained experience in all phases of the architectural process, from the design stage all the way to construction, making a point of always being at the building site to supervise ongoing work. For Tukan, all the phases and stages of the architectural process are perforce linked together in a coherent whole: there can be no skipping over or leaving out. No less important, in his estimation, is the relationship with the client, a valuable lesson he learned from fellow architect and colleague Ghassan Clink during his years at the Dar Al-Handasa Studio. Tukan would listen to his client with infinite patience but he would also stimulate and propose solutions far beyond the client's ken.

In 1968, the year of the student uprisings in European capitals, Tukan made a break of his own by resigning from the Dar al-Handasa and setting up his own studio. This was the time commissions from the Gulf States began to pour in. It was also then that he designed the Aysha Bakkar Mosque and came to measure the truth of Jacques Berque's words a propos of what is sacred: "that which is divine has a way of showing up in Nature and the marvels of everyday life without either self-complacence or haughtiness, without the believer in any way having to relinquish the feeling that God is unfathomable and almost incommunicable; he is privileged, but insofar as he is a man."

Beirut's architecture continued to exert its fascination and he particularly admired the fertile work of the elder and more experienced Georges Rais.

Together they set up the Rais and Tukan Architects studio in 1973, but it was forced to close down in 1976 due to the civil war.

This was quite an intense time in Tukan's life. An active net-worker on the world-wide architectural scene, he came to know some of its

Aysha Bak

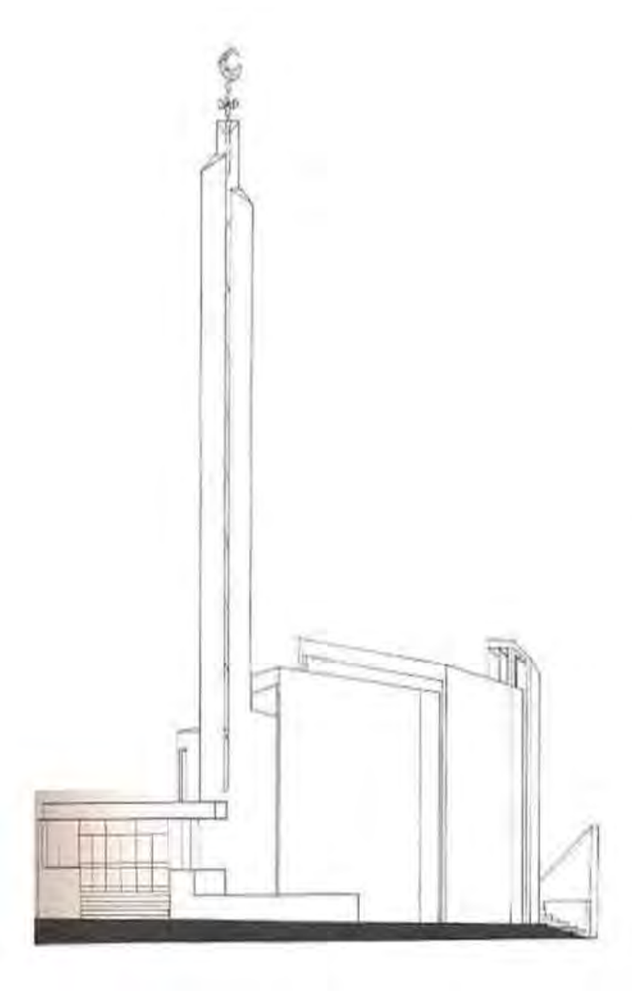
most outstanding protagonists including: Oscar Niemeyer, the fascinating hand behind the architecture of Brasilia; Jørn Utzon, responsible for the extraordinary Sydney Opera House, surely one of the 20th century's masterpieces; and Felix Candela, whose magic structuralist touch imbued concrete with poetry, pushing this material to limits never-before-seen. He was able to meet Kenzo Tange, who had picked up the legacy of the Modern Movement in its most stimulating aspects, and the Sino-American Ieoh Ming Pei, of the glass pyramid in front of the Louvre fame. Then there were the Egyptian Hassan Fathy, a leading name in Arabic architectural renaissance, as well as Rifat Chadirji and Mohamed Makiya. Tukan has met them all personally, whether visiting their studios, Tange's in Tokyo or Pei's in the United States for example, or during the many conferences and meetings at which he has actively contributed.

The tragic events of Lebanon's civil unrest in the late '70s forced Tukan to leave. He moved to Amman where he set up the *Jafar Tukan & Partners* studio.

Innovative solutions to housing problems have been its hallmark, resulting in the construction of the Villa Rizk and the Villa Salfiti.

It was through these works that he began to free himself of his cultural indebtedness and to become more aware of the new expressive choices open to him now that he had returned to his country, a homecoming which coincided with his gaining full-fledged professional maturity. He achieved this by his desire to explore the linguistic terms of architecture through a series of experiments — veritable chemical reactions with the power to release hidden valences – that enabled him to formulate new expressions, channels of hitherto unknown meaning such as was able to raise doubt or perplexity, as well as consensus mixed with amazement and marvel.

He reflected on the fundamentals of living space and found convincing solutions, extending his experimentation to the collective issues of public buildings such as the Petra Bank (1982) and the Riyadh Centre (1983).



Pursuing a path of research that carefully avoided the superficial clichés usually applied to Arab contemporary architecture, Tukan designed buildings that hinted of international style whilst maintaining the expression of native emotions deeply rooted in their environment. The influence of his work, spread out like patches here and there over Amman, began to make itself felt and contributed to the architectural renewal of this ancient city.

Like Badran, he saw modernity as a development that could only take place if it were profoundly and knowingly rooted in tradition, tradition being the indispensable basis without which architectural space could not successfully renew itself, just as it could not but condition and modify social behaviour. This was a sensitive phase that turned out to have an incisive impact on Tukan, as he progressively rid his works of any residual features introduced into the Arab world by a superficial western vision of Islamic culture.

However, Tukan takes a favourable view of international influences, of "hybrids", starting with the expressive root words of mentors such as Frank Lloyd Wright and Kenzo Tange which he has accepted not passively. He sees them as fodder for the complex mechanisms that go into any project in which local tradition is to find its rightful place alongside a re-evaluation of international and cultural boundaries. Badran, on the other hand, claims a narrower viewpoint, one that is entirely enclosed within the history of Islamic architecture and the possibility of renewing it from within – no small challenge and undoubtedly a very interesting one.

Tukan finds Wright particularly convincing because he never loses sight of the primacy of the immaterial and emphasises architecture's capacity to act directly on space, pointing out how "matter is always revealed to us in a state of either birth or unfolding." His planetary description of cosmic unfolding is incredibly topical, as witnessed by the following paraphrased comment: all matter lies heaped in a mass or floating like gas over the landscape of our planet, more or less as the cataclysm of Creation left it. At the mercy of cosmic elements,

Zaatara Mosque



this matter was disintegrated by high temperatures, levelled by glaciers, eroded by the wind and sea, shaped by untiring forces that mutually qualify one another. ... All matter is modified by time, just as it modifies the earth in an unending succession of changes.

In his writings, Tukan has often returned to the burning matter of 20th century architectural practice, and he expresses his views very clearly when he says: "I believe the world's architectural tradition is the first thing I must look back at to find the logical processes that will help me renew Jordan's architecture in the right way." In order to complete the picture we have drawn so far, we also need to mention another architect, Waddah el-Abidi, who introduces a very personal element to the architectural debate. His work is fundamentally "monumental", being characterized by a constant, and highly recognizable use of stone.

Waddah el-Abidi was born in Safad in 1944, graduated in architecture from Egypt's Alexandria University in 1967, and in 1974 received his D.P.L.G. from the École Nationale Superieure des Beaux Arts in Paris. Among his most significant works we can mention the building that is now the head office of Amman's newspaper Dar Al-Shaab and, in the same city, the Abu el Ragheb shopping mall. A former university professor, Abidi thinks an architect should place himself at his client's disposal, avoiding any imposition. In this way he attempts to translate into his architectural language the real needs of the Jordan community, which he considers endemic and not interchangeable with imports inspired by totally different cultures.

At this point we would like to outline a critical analysis of Tukan's works in Amman and elsewhere, in keeping with the way architecture is conceived in Jordan, and to explain "the known through the unknown", to quote Karl Popper. In this regard, Tukan seems to share Franco Rella's view when he says that "we can make things live only by changing them and becoming ourselves objects of change. Things, usually imprisoned in their stiff functional objectivity, are set free from this mortal rigour only when we dare the ultimate transformation, when we dare, by putting their images and ours at stake, a real transfiguration, and thus we not only change the object, but the entire context that surrounds it and through which it appears to us."

The city of Amman

"The city - as Abd al-Rahman Munif convincingly writes in his well-known *History of a City* – is not its monuments, not even in their most detailed description, and is not the waters, the land and the trees one finds there, although, of course, those things all together or individually exist or can be imagined.

The city does not only consist of the people who live there, even though they give it vitality and a special flavour, as well as a past period cannot be recollected by simply examining a number of events, because, no matter how useful they may be in showing us the right direction, they do not allow us to get where we want.

The city, whatever it may be, is the sum of all those things and more, which interlace, mingle and merge, so that their combination turns out to be something different from the elements that compose it, and despite its indissoluble bond with those elements, it is not identical to any one of them."

What Abd al-Rahman Munif did with human events, we shall try and do with buildings, by drawing up a map and reconstructing from the beginning of the century the recent history of a city which is the political, social and cultural capital of Jordan. We shall start from its small centre, from which a kind of diffused urbanization spread over the surrounding hills, as can be seen in photographs of the time, which seem to keep the flavour of the good old days. There is a scattering of low houses dominated by the ruins of the Umayad Castle and the Roman Theatre alongside the deep track of the railway line running towards the Hijaz region of Saudi Arabia.

Starting in the early 20th century Amman began to be a more lively and important place. It was, in fact, chosen as residence, or more precisely as reststop, by the Russian population of Circassia. According to a May 1991 article in *A'Jadid*, a quarterly review published in Amman, they were drawn to the area by the presence of water (such a precious commodity even nowadays that some political

experts assume it will be one of the causes of future wars), in addition to the easy connection provided by the railway.

A further step in the development of Amman took place in the early 1920s, when the city flourished on the site once occupied by numerous Mediterranean and Near Eastern peoples, from the Ammonites to the Assyrians, the Jews to the Babylonians, the Nabataeans to the Romans, the Byzantines to the Arabs and the Ottomans. Its rebirth was the achievement of Prince Abdullah, great-grandfather of the present sovereign, who chose Amman as his capital, building his residence along the railway and establishing his court there.

The predictable result was a pole of attraction, a role the city has had ever since.

Originally most of the new civilian housing - as Taleb Al Rifai writes, in the book *The first houses built in Amman* (Jordanian University Press, Amman 1987), did not exceed a height of two storeys and their shapes usually reproduced the typical Arabian cube. The buildings used for commercial activities were very similar, as they mostly consisted of a ground-floor shop opening on the street. It is interesting to note the total absence of architectural projections on buildings used for civil administration, which were placed in the rooms of ordinary houses, whereas religious buildings are always characterized by minarets and domes.

The typical style of all Amman's buildings between the 1920s and the 1940s, including the royal palace, can be defined as a mixture of Islamic and Byzantine architectural features, while the material in use was stone, in different colour nuances ranging from light pink to basalt dark grey; the stone, squared and worked, is always in sight.

As is well-known, after the 1948 conflict with Israel, the Palestinians lost a portion of the their territory. As Tukan himself wrote: "In the years before 1948 the Zionist movements increased their violence and a black cloud hung over Jerusalem so that moving about the city

became more and more difficult until it was divided." Part of the populations that lived in the Palestinian territory poured into Amman, producing sudden growth.

The increase in the number of buildings, which produced an abnormal expansion of the city, causing it to invade the neighbouring territory; local builders and designers were attracted although, in most cases, foreign professionals were invited for the realization of important public buildings, as happened with the Jordan University hospital and the Sports City.

It was only in the 1950's and '60s that the first variations in traditional building forms appeared and specific interventions and interpretations were proposed which aimed at elegance and harmony with the International Style. This was a natural consequence of the cultural hegemony of western architecture, reflected in the massive introduction of new fruitful ideas and enhanced both by the foreign architects called to operate in Jordan and by those local designers who had studied in other countries and brought home the new ideas they had acquired. We must also consider the influence exerted in those years by the new atmosphere in the universities, where the avant-garde movements of the time were finding attentive and convinced supporters.

The economic boom of the '70s and '80s brought along a form of architecture which mirrored the recently acquired affluence, but many of the buildings designed as a display of luxury, clearly visible in the choice of materials and in their large dimensions, spoke a language far from refined and coherent. The new ease in travelling was also leading clients to order their architects to use a certain pattern they had seen somewhere, and in Amman this fact produced a mixture of architectural styles, often unjustified, haphazard and, in some extreme cases, in poor taste.

On the other hand, once released from the economic or political hegemony of other countries, Jordanians began to call for a return to traditional motifs, in architecture as well as in other areas, and this is why Jordan is the extremely interesting crossroads of lively

flow of ideas. Actually there are many works that show a deep interest in the return to traditional motifs; we are not only referring to the buildings designed by Rasem Badran and Waddah el-Abidi, but also to those designed by Farouk Yaghmour, who has given new life to the fantastic Solomon Pools, and to the architectures of Bilal Hammad, who graduated in 1975 from the school of architecture of Alexandria University and two years later opened a studio in Amman, the Team.

As early as his last university years, Hammad abandoned the dogmas of the Modern Movement for the study of Hassan Fathy's architecture. Consequently, when the winds of Post-modernism began to blow, he felt in tune with the new language, although he did not agree with some surface aspects of its manifold reality.

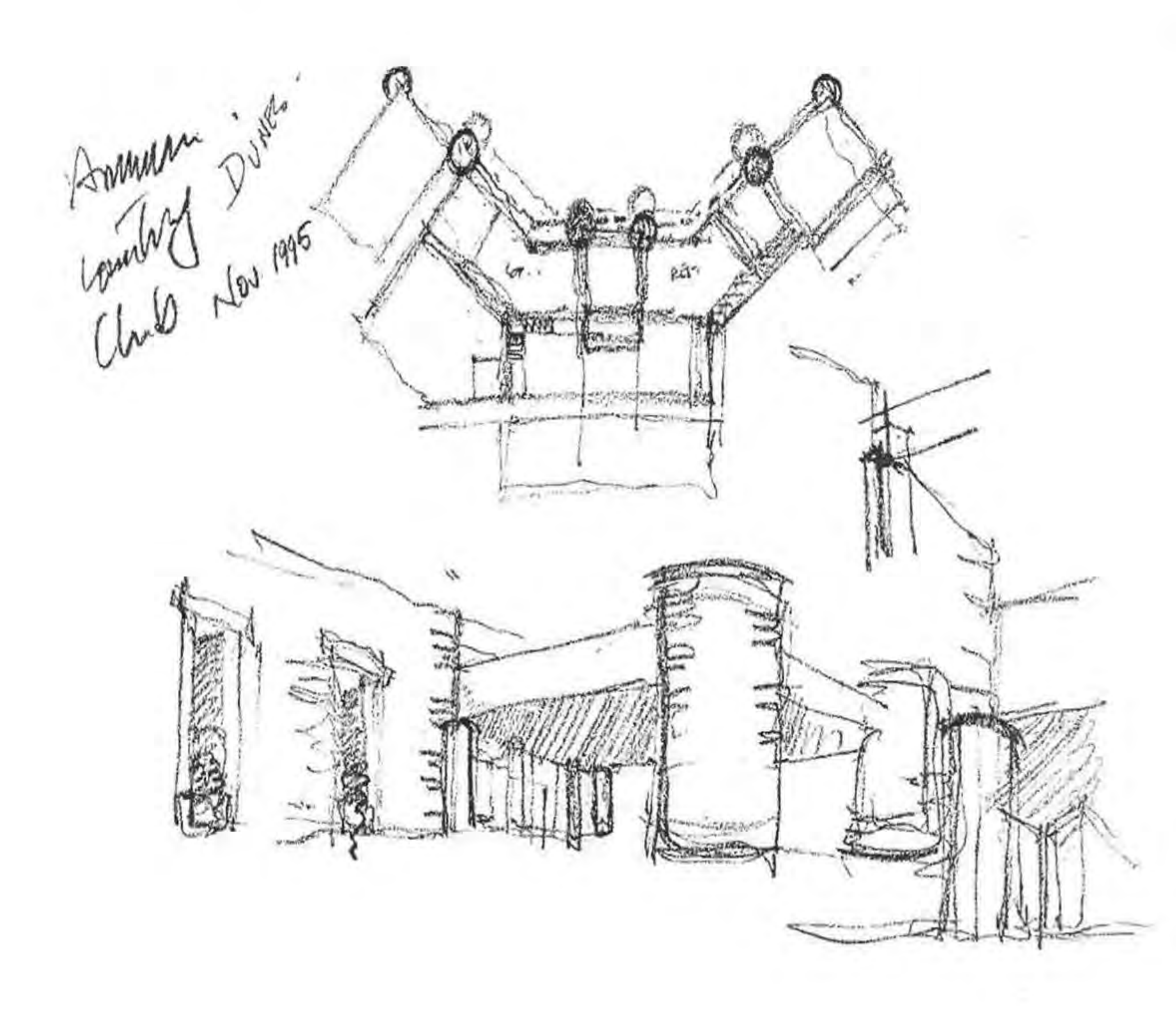
Proving to be quite optimistic about architecture in Jordan, today Hammad believes that certain designers, with solid character and excellent craftsmanship, are in a position to develop the discipline and to achieve a new renaissance in architecture. Both younger and more mature professionals are willing to improve communication and the exchange of ideas, as has happened in other periods of the country's recent history, when discussion and contrast of opinions brought about moments of unusual intensity.

Among Hammad's works we would like to mention the small quarter of Alribat, which was built in the 1980s, but remains a significant achievement, being the result of a project integrating city planning with landscape and architecture in its inclusion of the design of the courtyards, gardens, streets, and entrances. The Exhibition Halls, the Offices, the Mosque, the Circus, all immersed in vegetation. This project was the object of a consultation in which other designers were asked to take part with their own suggestions.

Going back to the general debate, the majority of designers confine themselves to the relentless use of the arch in its many different forms, often invented, offering it as the symbol of the best achievement of traditional Islamic architecture. On the other hand, in several

projects the International Style flaunts monumental aspects, as we can see in the Royal Cultural Centre in the Amman Tower and in the building of The Housing Bank, which has become one of the city landmarks. The designs of these works are apparently alien to the local architects, although architectural research of the '80s and '90s was clearly based on regional forms and elements.

Today the image of this city, originally lying on seven hills like Rome, may not be clear at first sight, as its dynamic modern face, marked by the light of signage and endless streams of traffic, somehow conceals the ancient traces of a nearly three thousand-year history. To get a global view of Amman, where ancient and modern blend, you have to go up to the citadel, an ancient fortress which preserves a few traces of The Temple of Hercules built by Mark Aurelius in the second century A.D. The view from there is truly beautiful, especially towards sunset. It is the sight of a fascinating sort of Nativity Scene where little two-storey houses cling to the rock, disappearing into the gorges and valleys. Not far from there, the Archaeological Museum displays the famous earthenware pieces of the 7th century BC two-faced heads and the well-known Dead Sea Scrolls that tell of a fabulous treasure hidden between Hebron and Nablus. In the same area there are other architectural works both ancient and modern. An ancient one is the Roman Theatre, with a capacity of over six thousand spectators, and is almost a carbon copy of the theatre in Jarash, a nearby town with Greek and Roman ruins. The modern ones, half-hidden among the signs of the Islamic tradition, use airy loggias to capture the wind and direct it into the houses like a gift from Heaven, lowered arches emphasizing the thickness of the walls, overhangs evoking the Mihrab, the niche in the wall of the mosque (qiblah) looking towards Mecca, arcades and inner courtyards, charming moucharabieh. Everything is done in pale yellow limestone, which turns golden in the sunlight.


Amman 'Dunes'
Country
Club Nov 1995

A CRITICAL ITINERARY

The beginnings of architecture: an unavoidable step

"Building means co-operating with the Earth, impressing the mark of man on a landscape that will be forever modified; it also means contributing to that slow transformation that is life itself."

M. Yourcenar, *Hadrian's Memoirs*

Before embarking on critical analysis of Tukan's works, it might be worth summarizing what has been happening on the international scene during the last 40 years, to remind the reader of some landmarks, while at the same time attempting to link them to Tukan's creative itinerary.

The 1960's appeared to have been particularly caught up in those architectural systems that found their best expression in Louis Khan's fascinating projects for the city of Philadelphia, in Archigram's mechanistic utopias, and in the ideas suggested by Kenzo Tange for the bay of Tokyo or for Skopje, in Yugoslavia, which all left a deep mark in the collective architectural imagination.

The 1970's, on the other hand, seemed to be more interested in metaphor, or rather in the upsetting of text by the introduction of some provocative element. Good examples could be Hans Hollein's early works, like the gigantic Rolls Royce radiator on the background of a mountain, James Stirling's Derby project, or Arata Isozaki's Tsukuba City of Science in Tokyo.

The 1980's opted for a narrative approach, where architecture was seen as a way of going beyond history (which was left momentarily in the background almost in order to encourage its great return), privileging society and, in particular, the built fabric of the city.

Dunes Club, sketches

If we analyse the works of our architect, we have the impression that, in spite of some formal changes in the course of time, the three basic approaches mentioned above - systematic, metaphorical and narrative - are strictly connected with and are an integral part of his poetic vision.

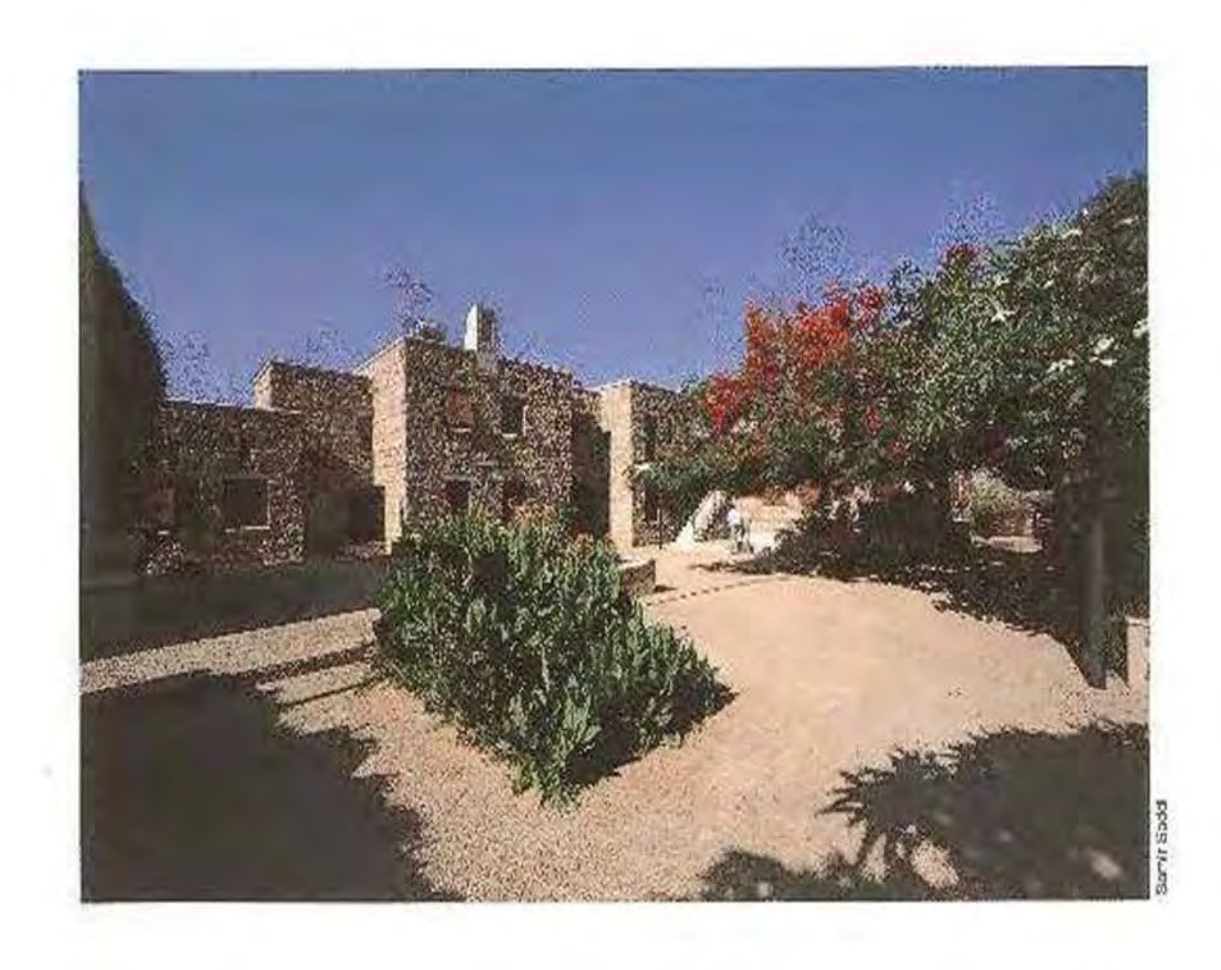
In the 1990's, undoubtedly his most mature period, especially with the village for abandoned children in Aqaba, with the Dunes Club, with his Jerusalem project and some more recent ones for Amman - from Qattan Villa to the Bank of Jordan, from King Hussein Park to the Art Museum and the Civic Centre - Tukan's aim seems almost to be that of the reorganisation and re-assembly of all his past experiences in a more personal way. What emerges most clearly from his whole creative itinerary is that the various forms of architecture are initially generated from the building type. Up to then the logic of function had always stood at the basis of modern architecture, but gradually became less important during the years of Post-modernism, when every designer felt free to choose his or her own style, giving rise to a rapid succession of styles, and often rediscovering the iconic quality of architecture.

During the 1990's Tukan tried to rearrange everything all over again and began to think of architecture as a problem of force possessed by form. His interest was shifting from metaphor and history to form, as his most recent production clearly shows. In the process of creating architectural form, the designer is the first receiver, the one who carries the historical and social memory of his physical and architectural environment. As such, he isolates from the context of memory some particular pieces of information and then, as transmitter, he elaborates and transforms them by applying a certain set of rules, into symbolic patterns that will become the reference system of architectural theory and practice.

Tukan began slowly, his style conforming to the current fashion, without any trace of the experimentalism that was to characterise his later works. If we analyse his first design for a private house in

Dunes Club





Samir Sadd

SOS Childrens Village



Amman (1960), we notice a correct use of the architectural language, but it is a far cry from his future developments which aim at a deeper investigation of ethnic elements and at combining them with the style features of the international Modern Movement. The house, commissioned by a relative and later modified and raised above ground, respects the planimetric tripartition typical of Jordanian homes in the 50s and 60s: a central space dedicated to service functions, the dining area with living room and the night area located laterally. The masonry walls are load-bearing, the stone ashlars displayed on the outside are either rough-hewn or smooth, in which case the material changes its colour. This building is only an episode that must be seen in the context of a period the architect tends to consider transitional, since his professional energies were mainly spent on his anonymous position in the Ministry of Public Works, where he took part in the designing of school theatres, tourist reception areas and of the Amman Police Head Office.

As has already been said, he did not spend more than a year in Amman, as he was unable to grow professionally in the Jordan of the early Sixties. His wish to take part in a more stimulating and complex professional debate forced him back to the city where he had studied, Beirut, to complete his professional training. He lived in Lebanon for about 15 years, from 1961 to 1976, before making his definitive return to Jordan.

Towards experimentalism

"Forcing youself to use restricted means is the resort of restraint that liberates inventing. It obliges you to make a kind of progress you cannot even imagine in advance."

Pablo Picasso

The opening of the *Jafar Tukan & Partners* studio in Amman, which in the second half of the 1970's took on the role of importance previously enjoyed by Beirut and was, therefore, marked by deep changes, was the beginning of a new creative stage for Tukan as an architect. The partners of the studio were mainly the same he had had in the previous one he had co-directed with Rais.

This was the beginning of a new and more mature period in his professional career, marked by the influence of those international ideas he had derived from a deep study of the architectural avant-garde and by the new design skill he had put to the test on the worksite. We must not forget, in this outline of the development of Tukan's personality and of the store of knowledge he had when he began elaborating his projects, the place where he was living in what we may call his "analytical period" - the Gulf Countries. There he had gradually taken sides against the current trends he had initially conformed with, after long discussions with another member of the Dar Al Handasa studio, Antony Erving. Erving was a supporter of the *Instant Islamic Style*, a fake modern architectural hybrid which draped definitively western-style buildings in superficial Islamic forms. Tukan opposed this practice because he rejected what was behind it: the lack of architectural knowledge of the society in which these misleading objects which ignored the educational and social aims of art and architecture, were insinuated.



After a period of collaboration with Tange on the project for Irbid's University of Science and Technology, Tukan designed Villa Rizk in Amman (1978-80).This villa is particularly important because it marks a turning point in the work of the forty-year-old Tukan. Since then, the villa has become a model for many others in Amman, as it is considered the first symbol of the new economic spirit of the city. For its architect it was probably just one more house like the ones he had designed in other countries, but in the new Amman, which was enjoying unprecedented affluence, this building became an aesthetic point of reference, almost a symbol of the aspirations of the new wealthy classes.

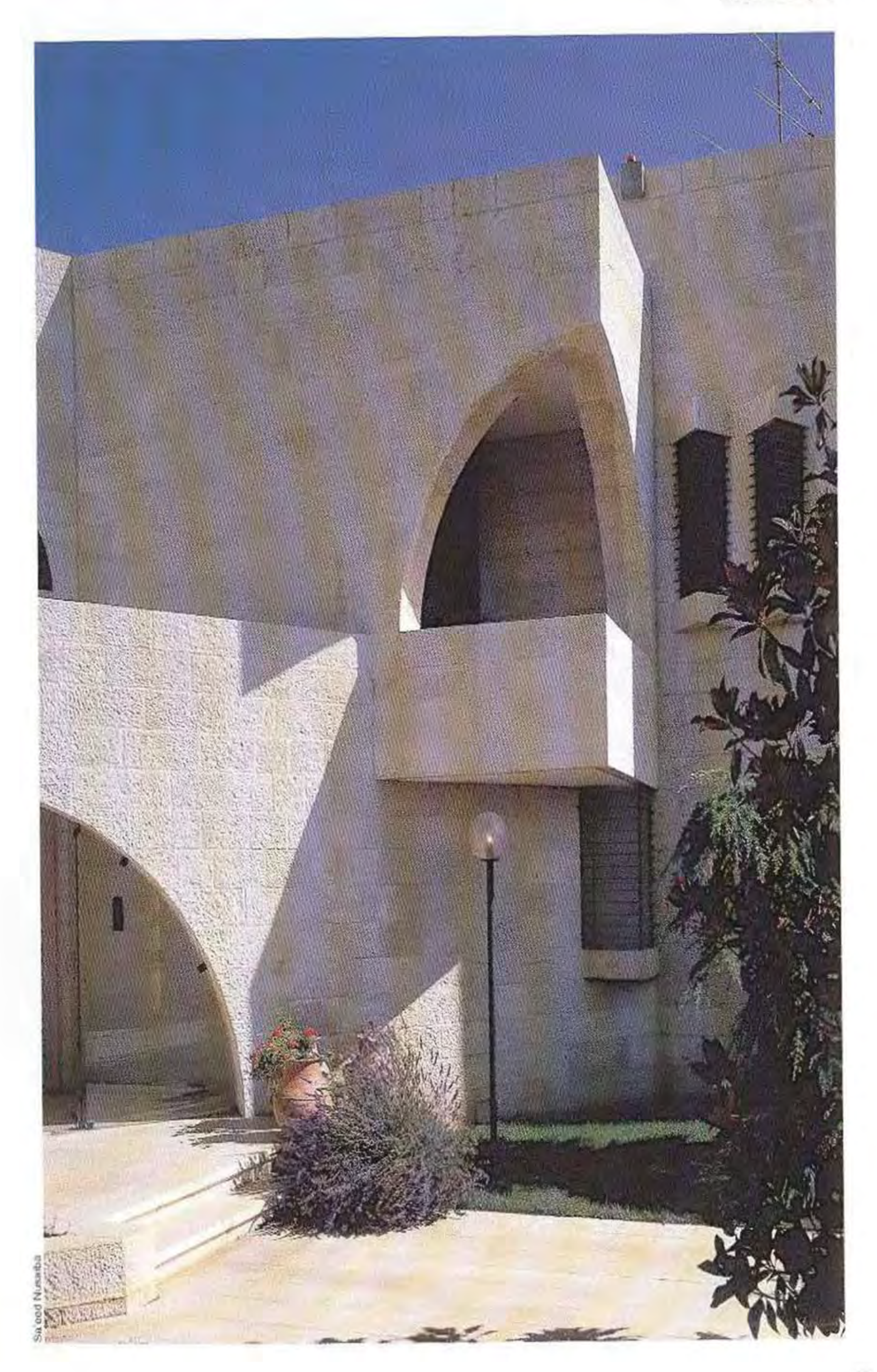
This prototype of the detached luxury house of the early 1980s, of the "villa", shows an extremely open plan, in which the designer avoids any rigidity even in the perimeter of individual rooms. We see the same freedom in the roofing inclined at different levels and covered in tiles, which have become very popular since then.

Tukan's design avoids compactness in the disposition of volumes. He chooses an agglomeration of individual volumes, some of which are made lighter by the presence of deep porticoes, a sort of organic extension of the garden that also create intense light and shade effects and recall Kahn in *Space and inspiration*, when he speaks of how inspiration is the perception of the beginning, of the threshold where Silence and Light meet: Silence with its desire of being, and Light with all the presences it evokes.

The Mediterranean character, provided by the relationship between volume and light, is obtained with the use of polished stone. The choice of keeping the textured stone ashlars always visible, which shows the importance attached to this all but irrelevant element, was to be one of Tukan's architecture's recurrent motifs.

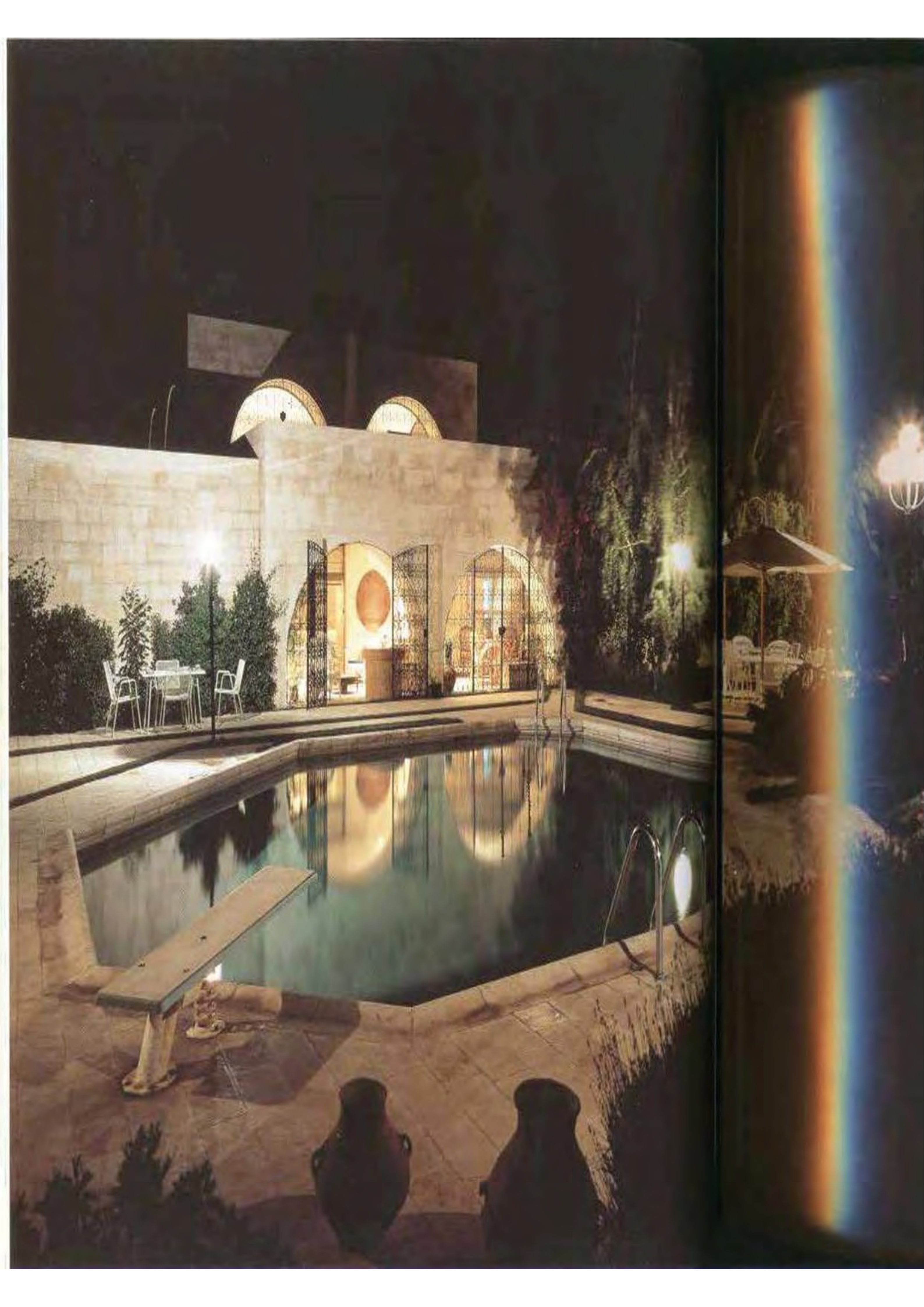
A careful observation of this building brings to the mind the thoughts of Frank Lloyd Wright on the *The Natural House*, when, and we paraphrase, he says that space must be seen as architecture, otherwise there is no architecture... growing from its place, emerging from the land and coming to light is in the nature of an organic building - the land

Villa Salfiti



Sa'eed Nusseiba

following page:
Villa Salfiti





Sa'eed Nuseiba

itself has always been an essential part of a building. Only then we have the new ideal of an organic building in the highest degree, a self-asserting building like a tree in the middle of nature.

Another notable aspect in the production of this period is the progressive disappearance of those deep arched openings he was still using, even if in a lowered version, in the Villa Rizk, where they were distributed in a refined alternation of empty and full spaces, in perfect harmony with the sophisticated movement of volumes.

At least three more examples could be considered as belonging to this expressive period, and they are detached houses as well: Villa Salfiti (1979-82) Villa Mubarak (1982-83) and Villa Kazimi (1982-83), all of them located in Amman. These three works, among the most significant after the Villa Rizk, represent a further step in Tukan's personal research.

In the Villa Salfiti what is particularly striking is the corner solution, where two half arches meet, at a ninety-degree angle, jutting out over the balcony. Here the architect designs a central block on two levels, lightened by large rounded arches. The building establishes a close relationship with the outside, appearing closer to organic architecture than to the usual Arabic way of building houses.

Here, although he does not use the sloped tiled roofing of the Villa Rizk, Tukan chooses a calibrated series of volumes which display a linear pureness which is reinforced by a reduced use of openings.

The four levels of the Villa Kazimi offer Tukan the opportunity to clearly differentiate the two house facades: on the one side, a high wall, almost citadel-like, with narrow loop-holes and a large window at the top, a very compact stone volume; on the other side of the house, instead, the wall is broken into an agglomeration of cubic volumes one on top of each other with low arched opening at the corners.

Belonging to this stage of his development, which we still consider a period of transition, are some important larger projects for public buildings in Amman: such as the Commercial Centre and Car Park,

late the seat of Amman's Town Hall (1980-83), the Petra Bank (1981) and the Riyadh Centre (1983-84), which has remained an office block.

In analysing these works, we notice some remarkable differences due, above all, to a sort of as yet undefined experimentalism, along with all the typical features of this author. The Commercial Centre and Car Park expresses the architect's desire to reproduce the style of the old Town Hall in a different material - reinforced concrete, a less precious material than stone but one that accommodates shops and car parks.

The Petra Bank building is a tall, compact block. On the main front, one of the corners is made lighter by the introduction of a typical element of Arabic architecture, the muqarnas, which marks the passage from the squared block to the dome covering through a 'bugle link', an architectural feature clearly inspired by nature, as it recalls the cells of a honeycomb. By tapering the angular volume, as if the building were spreading its arms to welcome the people entering, similar to Borromini's Oratorian Convent in Rome, and by painting the fixtures in red, the designer finds a way of making the block appear less monolithic.

In the Riyadh Commercial Centre we find, in the way that closed, compact surfaces are related to glazed ones, the application of Kahn's teachings concerning serving and served spaces. This work clearly demonstrates Tukan's desire to be in harmony with the architectural language of such masters as Paul Rudolph and Kenzo Tange. Moreover, the way glass and steel meet above the podium, taking the place of ancient open galleries, probably hints at Stirling's early works.

With the Riyadh Centre, the architect was attempting to introduce in Amman the use of a more advanced technology, and consequently of new materials, with the intention of repeating the experience of Villa Rizk. Tukan himself would declare: "I had to try!"

The experiment unfortunately was not successful, and this failure would give him cause to reflect: the obviously "imported" building became an object of debate and dissent. This would give the Jordanian architect who dared too much to "keep up with the times"

Villa Kazimi





the opportunity to learn from the results of the debate and reach a form of expression native and modern at the same time.

In order to give our readers an idea of the debate aroused by this unusual building, it might be useful to quote some significant parts of it as reported by *The Jordan Engineer*, the Journal of the association of Amman's engineers (38, 1987, pp 121-122)

Rasem Badran: *It is good technology, but it does not fit in our environment.*

Samih Bakir, architect: *A brave attempt, certainly unusual, but unfortunately it looks like a Parisian lady lost under the scorching sun.*

Taufiq Abu Ghaza, professor: *It would be pointless to express a favourable opinion. A critical one? "Now that we have a glass house too, we won't have to throw stones at other people's."*

Waddadh el-Abidi, architect: *Tukan himself says that you can't find the right answer unless you try all the possible solutions, and after this experiment I doubly admire this architect for his courage and for the quality of his work.*

Amani Malhas, architect: *It is a peculiar project, but influenced by that "oil culture" that fortunately is fading away in our country.*

Ten years have gone by since these words were spoken and a lot of things have changed on the banks of the River Jordan, in the university halls and the architects' studios. Today that work is totally integrated in our author's artistic itinerary, with its good points and its limits.

In a recent book, Manfredi Nicoletti reminds us, and his words seem particularly to apply to this work, that architecture's aim "is not to reveal the architect's technological ability, functional perfection or existential problems, but to tell, with extreme clarity, the wonderful tale contained in each theme as yet unexpressed. This tale will be told through a few essential forms: the only ones that can become symbols". And this work is undoubtedly among the essential forms that helped Amman to reach the threshold of the new millennium.

A new form of expression

"This is the art of modernity. Philosophy has not realised it yet, and art has undertaken the task of lighting up the world: to propose itself as a search for the foundations that will give words a new meaning; to become, in short, the new metaphysics."

Franco Rella, *Confini* La visibilità del mondo e l'enigma dell'autorappresentazione

We can place the mature stage of Tukan's production in the mid-'80s, when he managed to blend an induced type of architecture, like the one expressed by the Riyadh Centre, and the one of Villa Kazimi, where the attempt at rediscovering and elaborating on the motifs of the Arabic tradition is more evident.

We notice, in those years, and as far as private houses are concerned, a continuity in the designer's choices, a linearity due partly to the dimensions of the buildings, allowing for greater control over the results, partly to the fact that he had various opportunities to elaborate on this theme. Starting from a simplified and standardised typology, these opportunities have given our architect the chance to test many variations, in which the initial elements are, in turn, extended, mixed, reduced or enhanced.

In Villa Nassar, Amman (1985), we are surprised by the total absence of arches and by the presence of a terraced roof. Its most remarkable feature is the cubic volume of its various parts, arranged on two levels. The openings are square and very large, receding from the external perimeter, so that they can take advantage of light variations. The result is very sober, reduced almost to the bone, and the only form of decoration is provided by the precious stone of the walls, smoothed and light coloured.

Villa Abu Rahmi, also in Amman (1985), mingles two different materials, the local natural stone and concrete. The contrast between



the pink of the stone and the grey of concrete, and the combination of smooth and rough surfaces, enlivens the building and stresses the different functions of each space. At this stage we notice the introduction of "pilasters" of light - tall, narrow not-quite-open slits on the wall surface, used as an element of separation between parts - and the total absence of arches.

We could include in this stage also some collective buildings designed in the first half of the 1980s, such as the Engineers' Cooperative Housing Society, the Nusseibah apartment blocks and the S.O.S. Village in Aqaba.

The latter is one of Tukan's most significant works, charged with ethical values and particularly successful. The reasons for this success are many: the moving neo-realism of the construction - which forcefully re-proposes William Morris's query : 'why do we deal with art if not to share it with everybody?' - the plan of the village with its vast garden spaces, where we can imagine happy children running and playing, their houses arranged around a small square and all the facilities in the outskirts; the rustic stone, a very tough and inexpensive local granite that contrasts with the solar panels fixed on the roofs, the lively colours of shutters and doors, in accordance with Aqaba's traditional architecture, in which all doors and windows were brightly coloured and every house is of a different colour to express the personality of the family who lives there, thus creating a very lively and cheerful atmosphere.

We find this type of deep pink stone used in many of Aqaba's most interesting traditional buildings. This colour is unfortunately disappearing because, out of provincialism or of fickleness, people have started using the same materials employed in Amman. With his re-proposal of stone and the use of colour for fixtures, Tukan seems to be encouraging people to reflect on the risk of losing their identity. If not a real challenge, it is certainly a reminder and a warning to local designers not to forget their identity and lose themselves in an undifferentiated and tasteless mish-mash.

Villa Abu Rahmi

Moreover, the idea of creating a home for abandoned or orphan children using the archetype of the Arab house, squat and rooted to the land but enriched with bright colours and inexpensive stone, was a way of helping these victims of injustice to perceive, also through the architectural forms, the solidarity of their country. Our architect has thus managed to place himself on the same wavelength as the association that cares for abandoned children by proposing a vision that arises from their input. Once again, Tukan shows he can live his times without regretting the past, as a man, to paraphrase Walter Benjamin words "who in his vision embraces all dead things in order to save them."

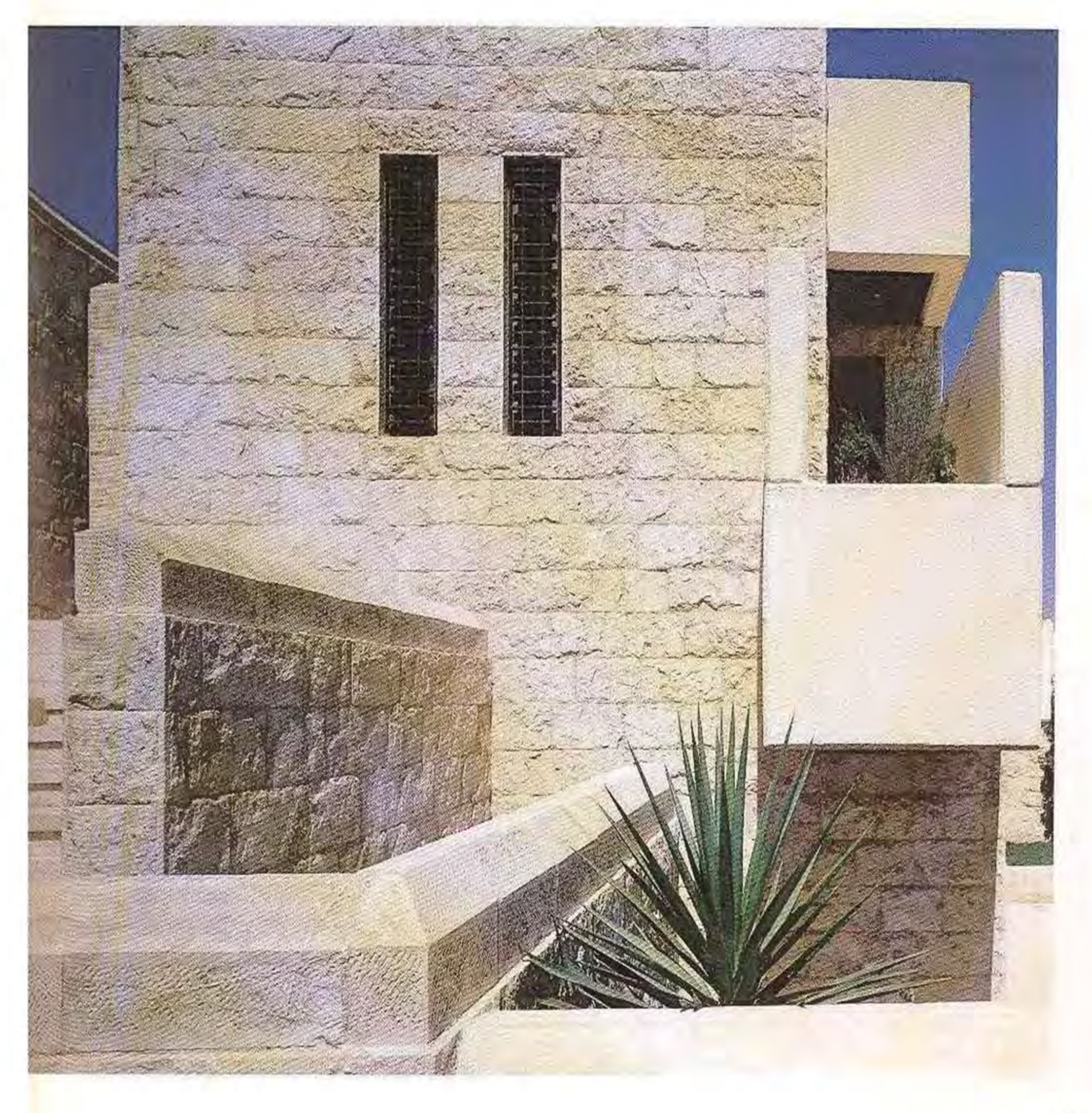
The step forward that characterises this phase of his career is clearly seen also in Villa Chalabi (1985-88) and Villa Abdul-Hadi (1985-89), statements of the new dignity reached by Jordanian architecture, free at last from external misleading influences.

Tukan's new architectural programme, effectively expressed in the Mediterranean style cubic masses, is sounder, the details more precise, thanks also to the more advanced professional skills of the local workers.

Our architect has now overcome his period of the deconstruction of the planimetric structure, organised as an organic agglomeration, to reach a complexity that no longer needs to express itself as an irregular perimeter, but becomes a "container". From now on the homogeneity of choices will be fundamental, and even if still focused on the central building, he does not disregard elements previously considered secondary in importance such as the fencing of the plot which underlines the relationship between the building and its surroundings. Another important element is the exploitation of sunlight, enhanced by the accurate choice of materials, by the way they are wrought and cut, and by their colours.

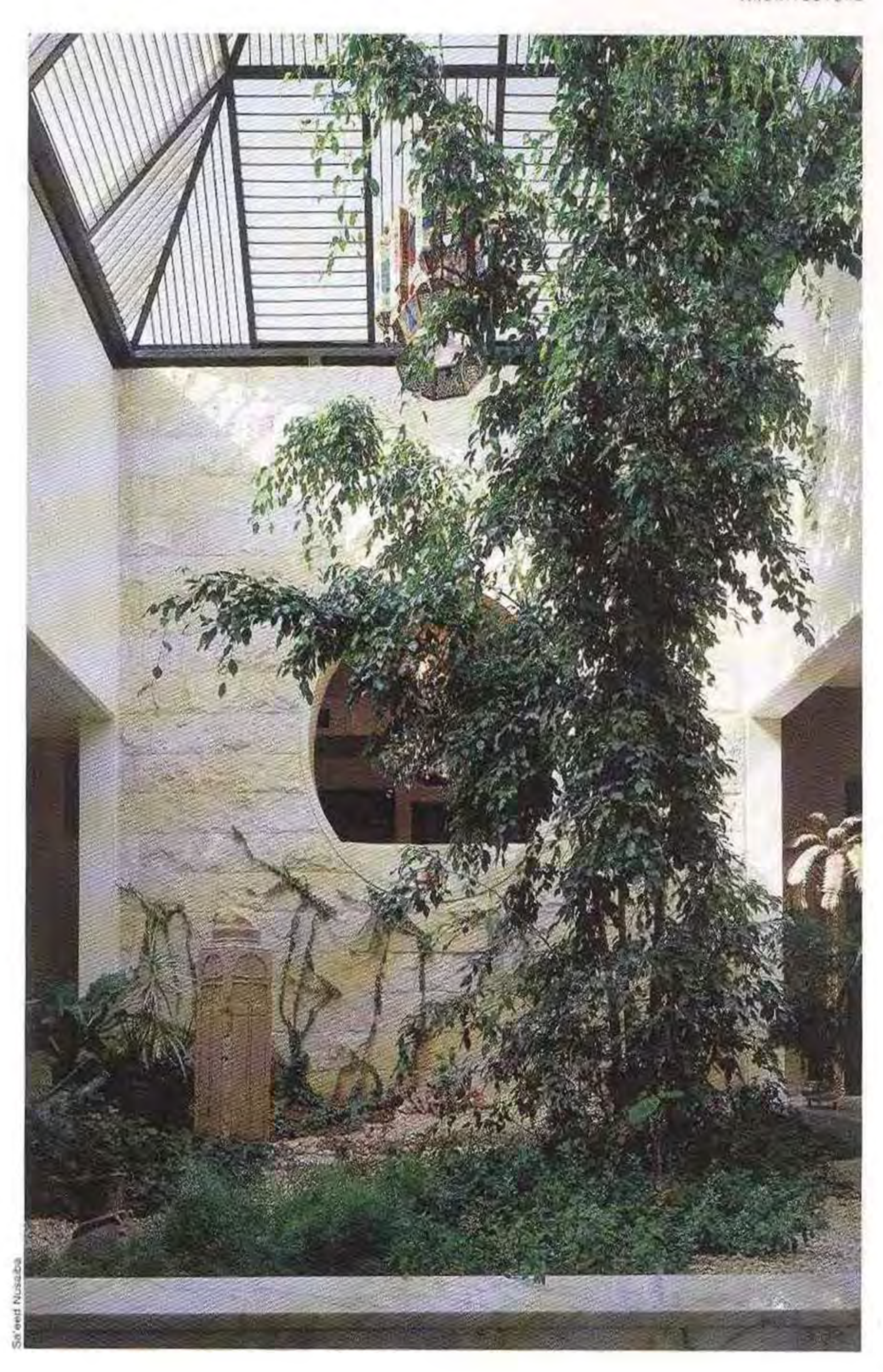
Designed for an Iraqi client, Villa Chalabi reflects a more Arabic taste. It is Tukan's most monumental work, conditioned by the personality of his client, the owner of the Petra Bank, who asked him

Villa Abu Rahmi





Sa'eed Nusaiba



Sa'eed Nussaiba

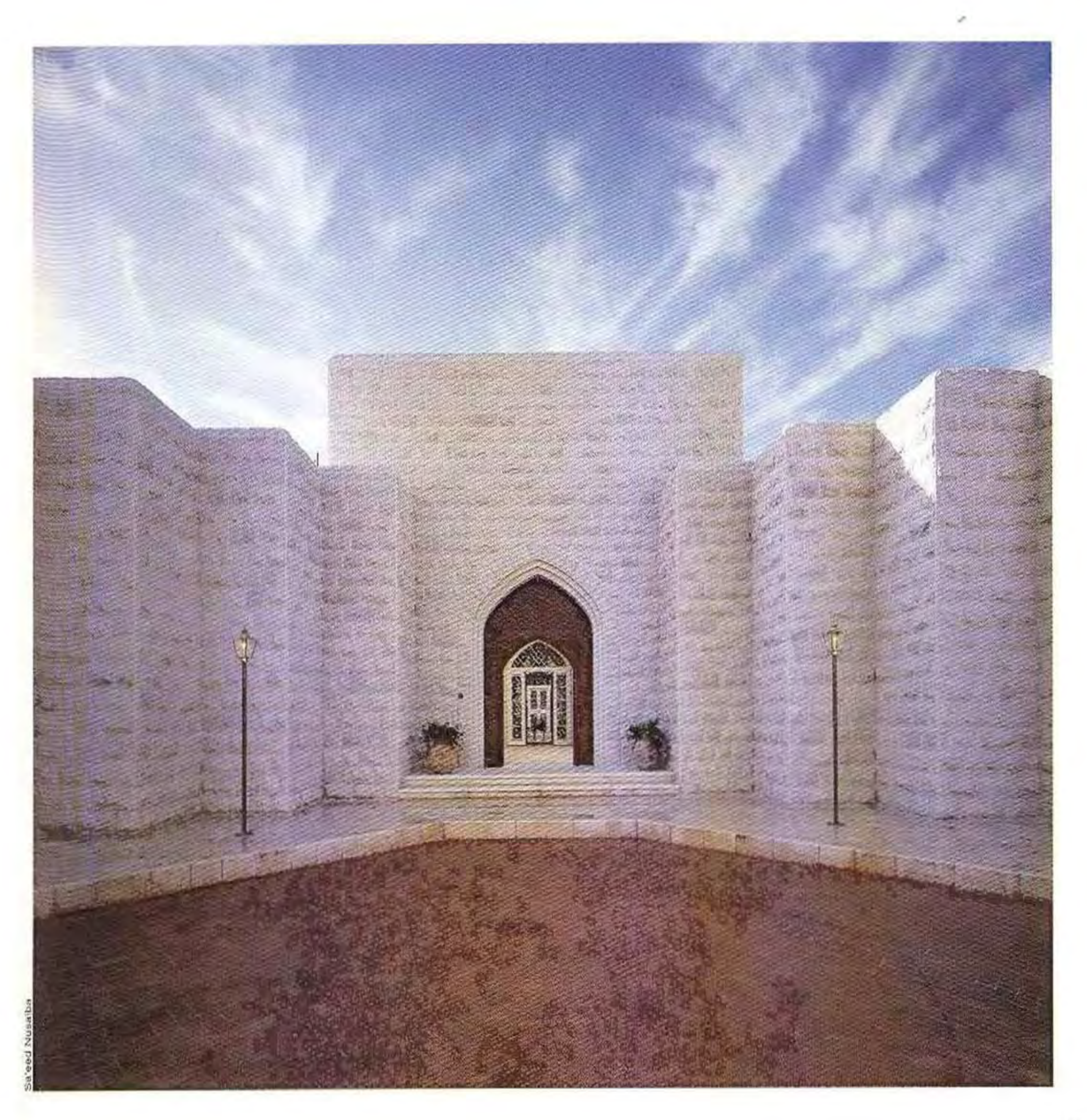
Villa Abu Rahmi

to create a cryptic and mysterious atmosphere. The exterior is hard, rough, closed to the world. The interior heightens the richness of the materials and the way they are combined and wrought. This magnificence is underlined by the contrast between plain and precious elements, the rough and smooth surfaces of walls and floors, which are recurring features throughout the house. Villa Chalabi is a turning point that emphasises the priority of architecture over decoration. In particular, the funnel-like opening in the external wall leading to the main hall creates an architectural passageway masterfully charged with emotion, of which the square volume framing the entrance to this "castle" is a natural consequence.

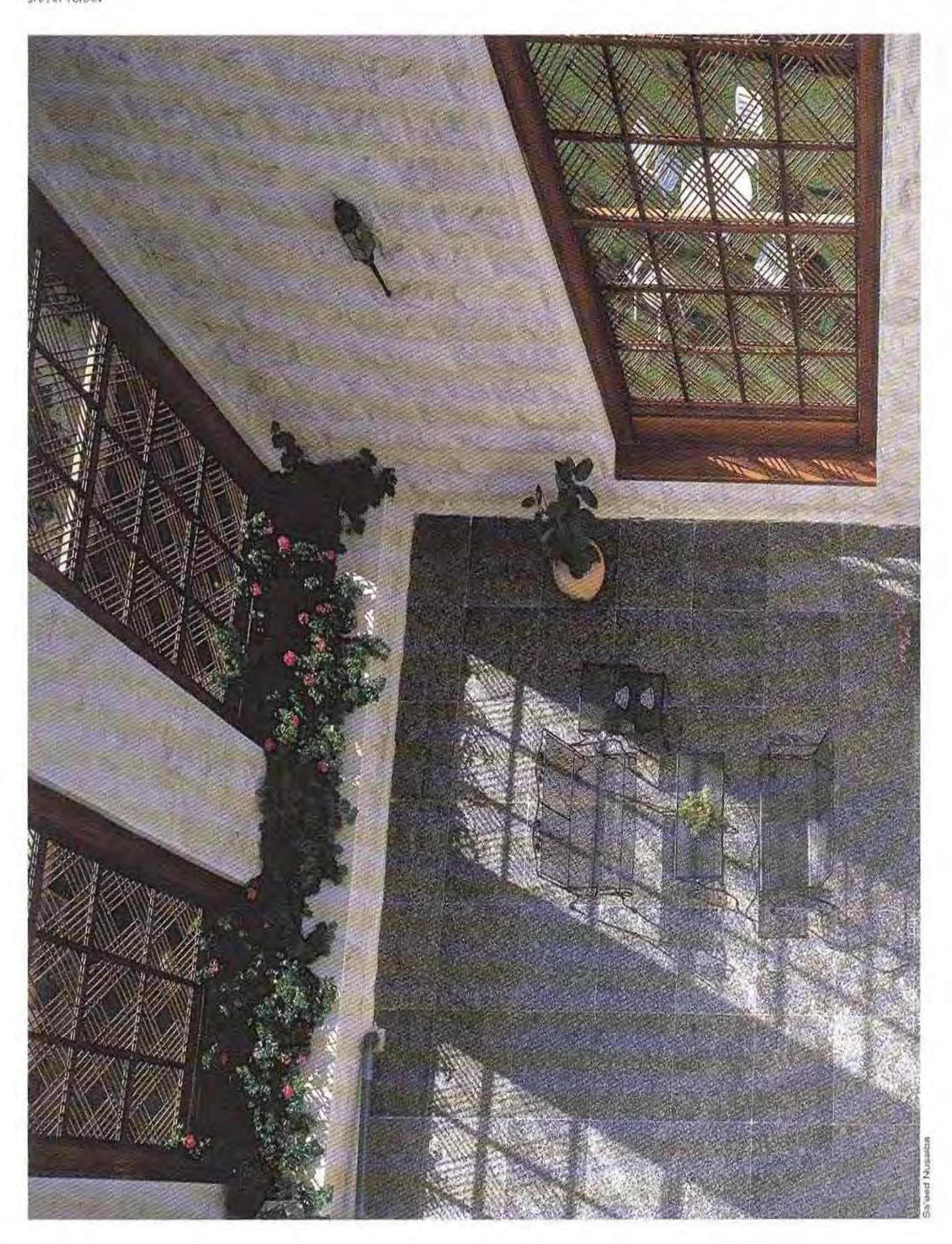
Villa Abdul-Hadi, instead, is totally different. It represents an element of continuity and a step forward in the production of our designer. The plan itself is the final result of his search for a new architecture rooted in tradition, as it starts from the typical structure of Amman's houses, with its usual division but with a renewed, slightly less central hall, and its openings. It is precisely the hall, previously a secondary feature and now part of a non-hierarchically organised plan, that helps us understand the spirit of this new architecture based on a single choice embracing the various elements of the building. The steps at the entrance raise the villa above the ground level, an effect that is mirrored in the ceiling with its luminous gradations, in concert with the repetitive and mirrored arrangement of the built volumes that characterises the entire house. Three are, in fact, the steps at the entrance and three the repeated openings in the upper floor, on the right and left of the hall, an element that, even if integrated in this new game, appears natural and "built for people".

The achievements of the late 1980s and early 1990s also mark a shift in the scale of Tukan's projects. The Arab Company for Drug Industries and Medical Appliances (ACDIMA) building (1985-87) and the Arab Insurance building (1988-90) are the most representative works of this period, to which we may add the Al Otoom Commercial Centre, the Arab Investment Bank and the Royal Jordanian Airlines Headquarters.

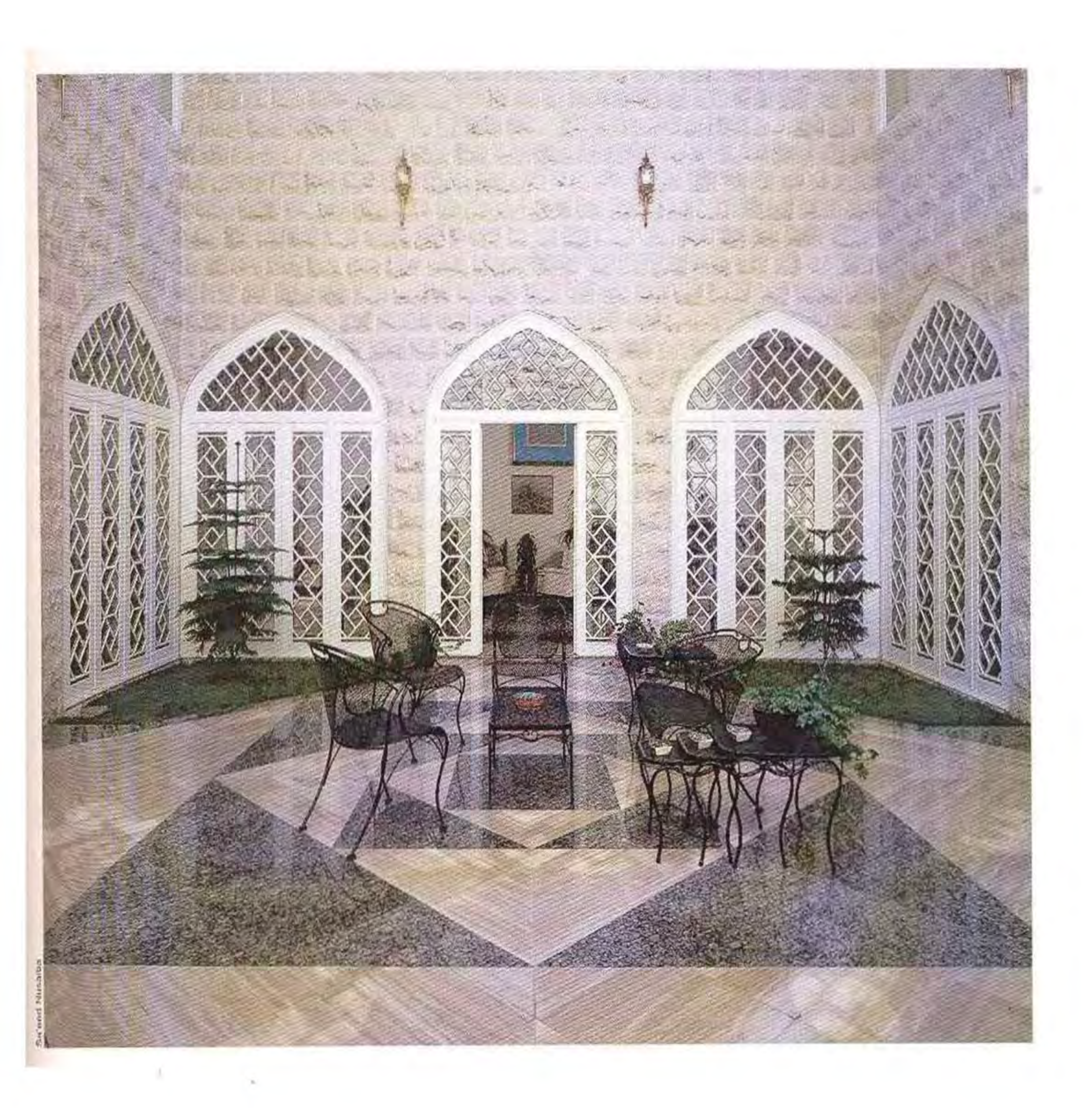
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Villa Chalabi



Sa'eed Nusaiba



Saeed Nusseiba



Saeed Nusaiba

The ACDIMA building immediately declares its nature in its use of stone instead of concrete, a material Tukan had previously employed for all public buildings. Following the configuration of the plot of land where it stands, the plan of the building is conditioned by the light, captured by various elements on a different scale and directed towards an internal yard covered with a metal structure. The windows are carved deeply into a slanting wall; sober projections create lines on the compact mass of the walls and the delicate relief work reveals its traditional origins.

The hall, as in the previous villas, is an important part of the project: it is not only the entrance to the building, but also the point where all the wall lines and decorations converge. In short, it is the vanishing point of the funnel-like space on the side of the building. Once again, Tukan is renewing this type of collective building by introducing a horizontal development.

The Arab Insurance building, instead, develops vertically. Here the architect pays the utmost attention to details as he once again mingles all the leitmotifs of his research: the effects of light and colour, the tapered central block, the study of openings. His choices appear subtler, accurate and balanced, but less obvious. Even the stone underlines this choice of an indirect intervention that we discover only with a closer look at the alternating colours of the lower part of the building. On the top floor there is a sort of large eye. At the top of a triangular volume a large terrace opens, and this way of screening the light is powerful enough to evoke ancient castles and temples. Looking at the shadows projected towards the interior we cannot help but notice a tribute to Louis Kahn. The expressive force of this building, that certainly does not conform to the technological fads of the time, shows the artist's interest in the way the building appears under the sun and the sky.

Also when designing the facades of the other buildings, the ACDIMA, the Royal Academy for Research and Islamic Civilization, the Complex of the United Arab Emirates Embassy, Tukan pays

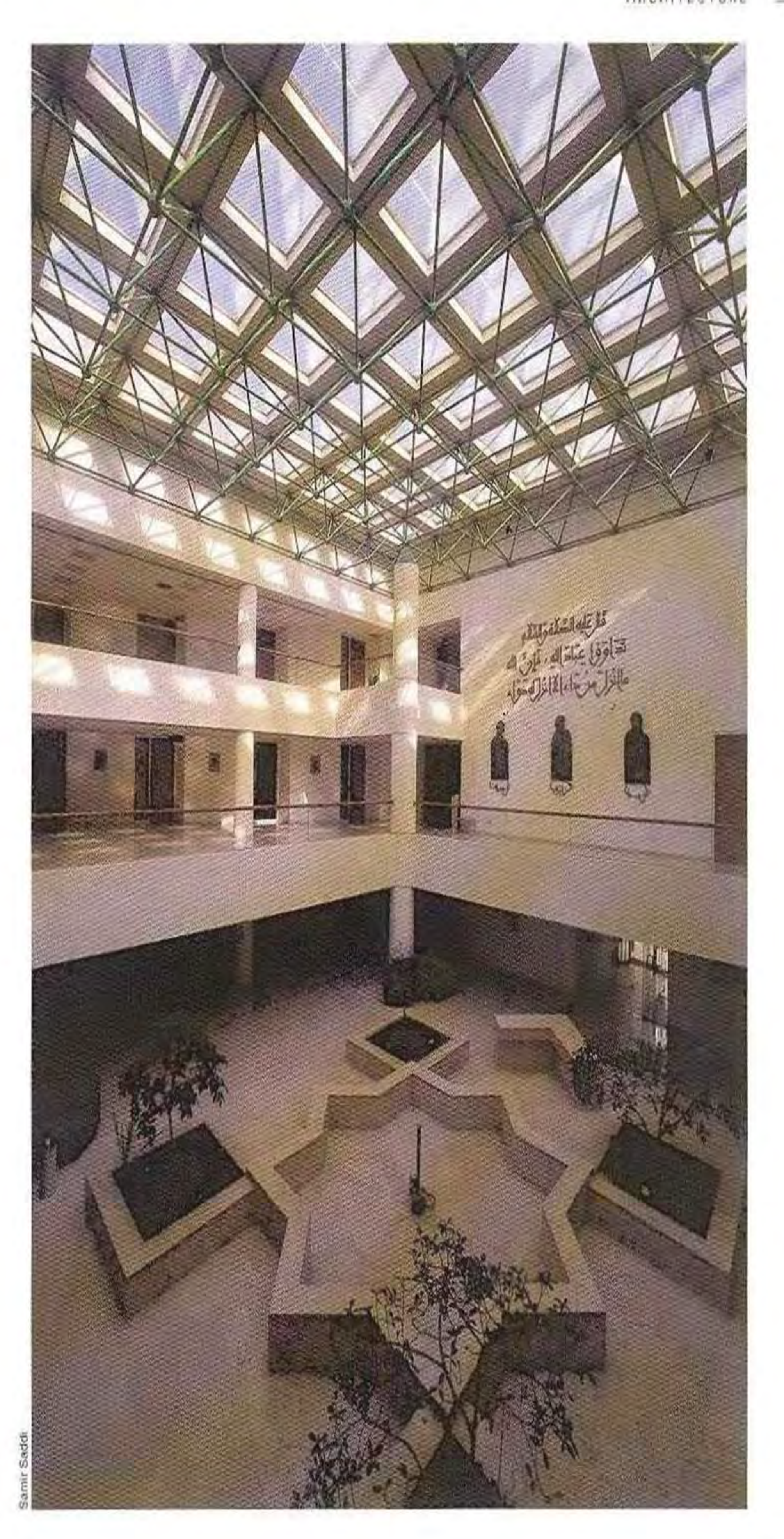
particular attention to the way some materials capture light, like the pale yellow Amman stone, which seems to catch fire in the golden sunset, a kind of stone that proves to be of great expressive force. In the examples mentioned, it is not used to surprise or awe, nor to excite or irritate, but to remind people that these are the colours of their land, considered a mother and provider not only of the raw materials that have been used since the dawn of civilization, but also of aesthetic hints and suggestions. Serenity dominates, and there is a sense of welcoming that aims at making one feel at ease upon approaching these buildings. Tukan knows that the eternal anguished question any architect asks himself, the one that most conditions his imagination is, quoting from Albert Jacquard: Will my work help other people to be more serene?

In the Jubilee School, a secondary school for brilliant students in a northern suburb of the capital, Tukan's composition is more radical and stresses the primary element of volume. It is a very essential composition, defined by the heavy mass of its walls on which light and shade play, the whole building seeming carved out of a single block of stone. The rigorous linearity of the surfaces is interrupted only by the projections, also in stone, that support the lighting. On the other hand, almost to emphasise the wall, blind tiles are embedded on top of some windows - a quotation from village houses. The only colour variations are provided by the sunlight on the walls, as occurs in the desert, with their different slant and intensity according to the time of day.

The plan shows a sophisticated internal division dominated by the octagonal courtyards and regulated by a rigorously squared structural grid. The designer has taken advantage of the diagonal shape of the plot to make the terraced side more dynamic. Its sections re-propose the varied heights used in Arabian houses to facilitate ventilation and the inflow of light. As Sandro Raffone states in a still-unpublished paper : "I think the architecture of the Jubilee School succeeds, without resorting to any mask, in being Jordanian and modern at the same


الشركة العربية للصناعات الدوائية والمستلزمات الطبية
(أكديما)

Samir Saddi



Samir Saddi

ACDIMA

time, according to the precept formulated in the 1930's by Massimo Bontempelli for Mediterranean Rationalism: "*Write on smooth walls and build without adjectives.*"

But there is more in this work that is worth underlining. First of all is the fact that it draws inspiration from the Jordan village. Villages in Jordan are still intact living places, communities governed by well-defined systems involving all aspects of life. Being a member of the local community is fundamental because it means taking part in the production process, being integrated in the community without losing one's individual characteristics. In this work one can feel the village spirit, all the humanity, the warm atmosphere, the sense of place, the homogeneity with the environment that are typical of Tukan's architecture.

The Dunes Club is situated along the road that links the Jordanian capital to its airport, in a place called Al-Yadoudeh, not far from a large green area: the Ghamadan, a real park of pines, Lebanese cedars, some scattered cypresses and the usual Mediterranean bush. The Club is immediately characterised by the presence of the local stone - ranging from Verona pink to a pale yellow a deeper shade than Roman travertine - and by aerial passages, a kind of turreting that suggest the idea of a fort, of a protected building. It appears almost like a mirage, made even more enchanting by the presence of water and palm trees that conjure up the fascination of exotic places, the idea of rest, the pleasure of relaxing far from daily troubles. Once inside, after leaving your car in one of the large parking lots hidden among the greenery, you discover that The Dunes extends for 12.000 square metres and is, first of all, a sports centre. Here you can practise any physical activity, from gymnastics to tennis, from basketball to volleyball; there is a fitness centre, two swimming pools, one indoors and one outdoors, a squash court and a dance gym. All these activities are not only for grown-ups and young people, but also for children, who start practising sports when they are still very young. But there is more: a business centre with meeting and conference rooms, a

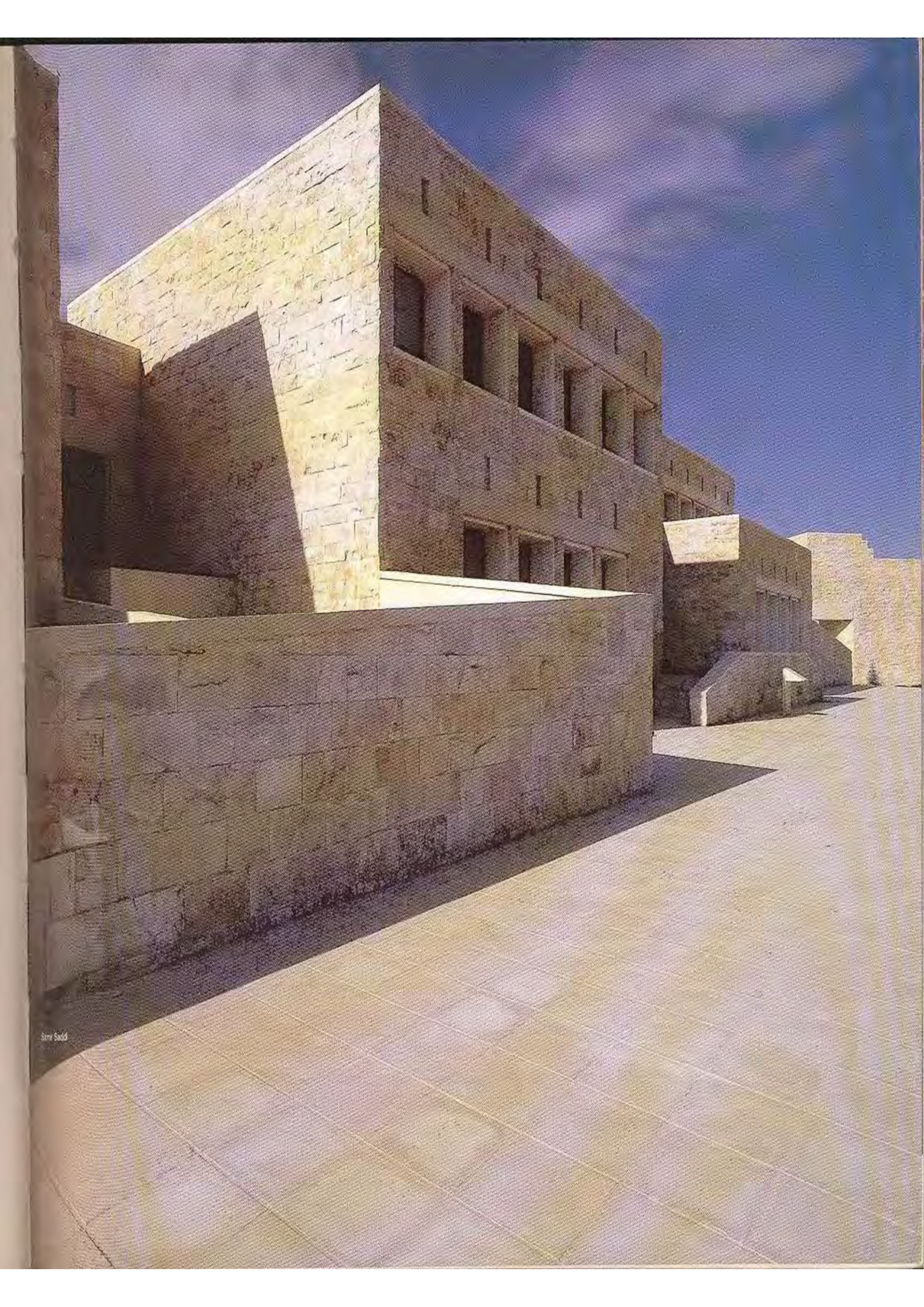
Arab Insurance



Samir Saddi



Samir Saddi



restaurant, a café, a pub, a large barbecue for open air picnics under the vines, with the pool and fountains giving a pleasant feeling of coolness. It is really a first class compound, skilfully designed, that witnesses a desire to modernize a country that, with its high number of graduates, is at the vanguard of the Middle East nations on the shores of the Mediterranean.

If we analyse this work, the rationalistic approach and the stress on functionality appear quite evident. We would also like to underline the great attention paid not only to the structure but also to details and materials. Finally, the charming position of this compound under the sky and the sunlight is really fundamental, as well as the colours, perfectly blending with those of the land, while in the facades particular attention is paid to the way the stone captures light since, as we know, this material is very powerful and can render a place memorable.

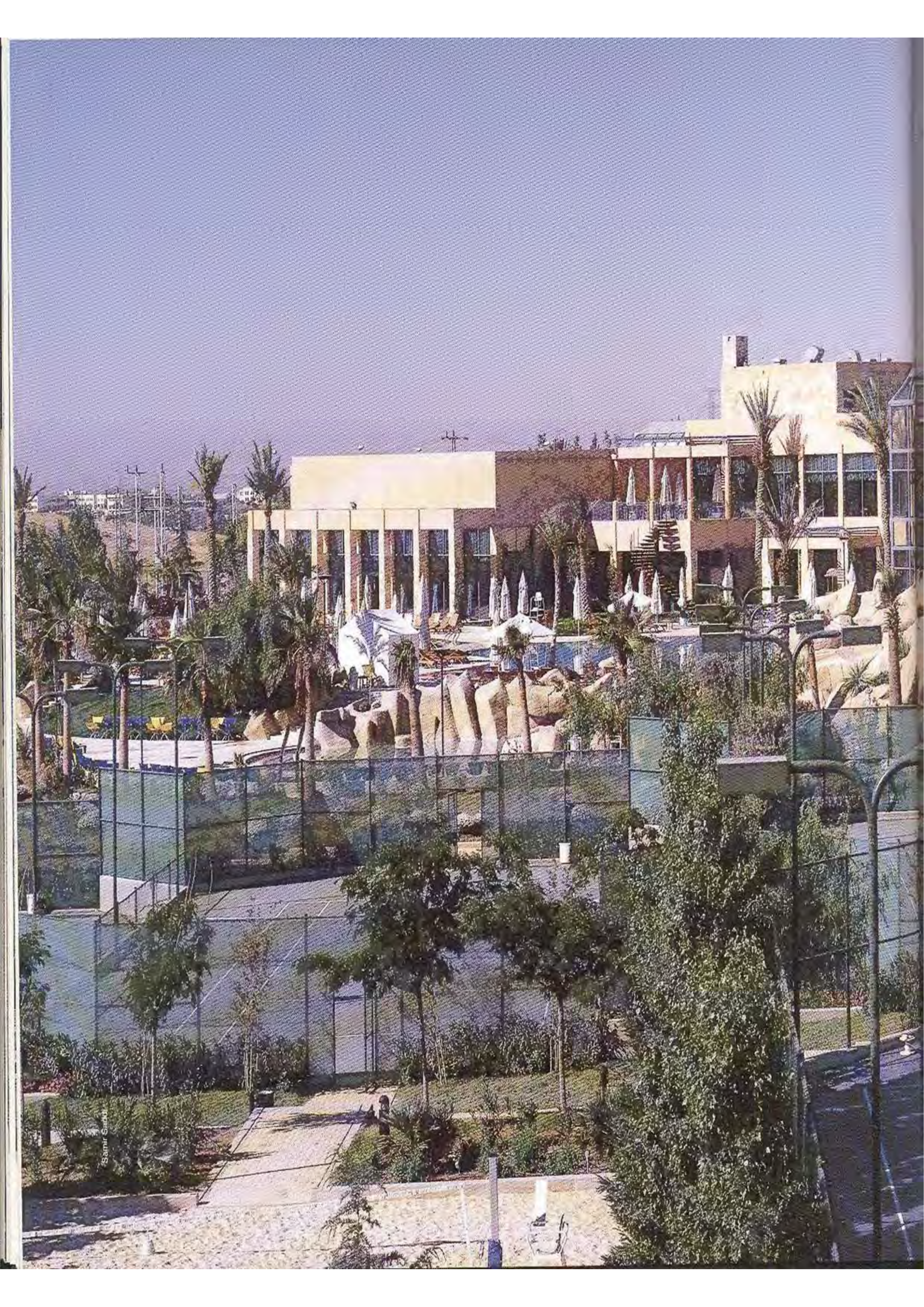
Among Tukan's most recent works we would like to mention Amman's new Civic Centre, a city landmark that appears rich and stimulating thanks to its internal structure, a sort of "agora" for the citizenship. In particular, Tukan and Badran designed the mayor's office and the great exhibition hall.

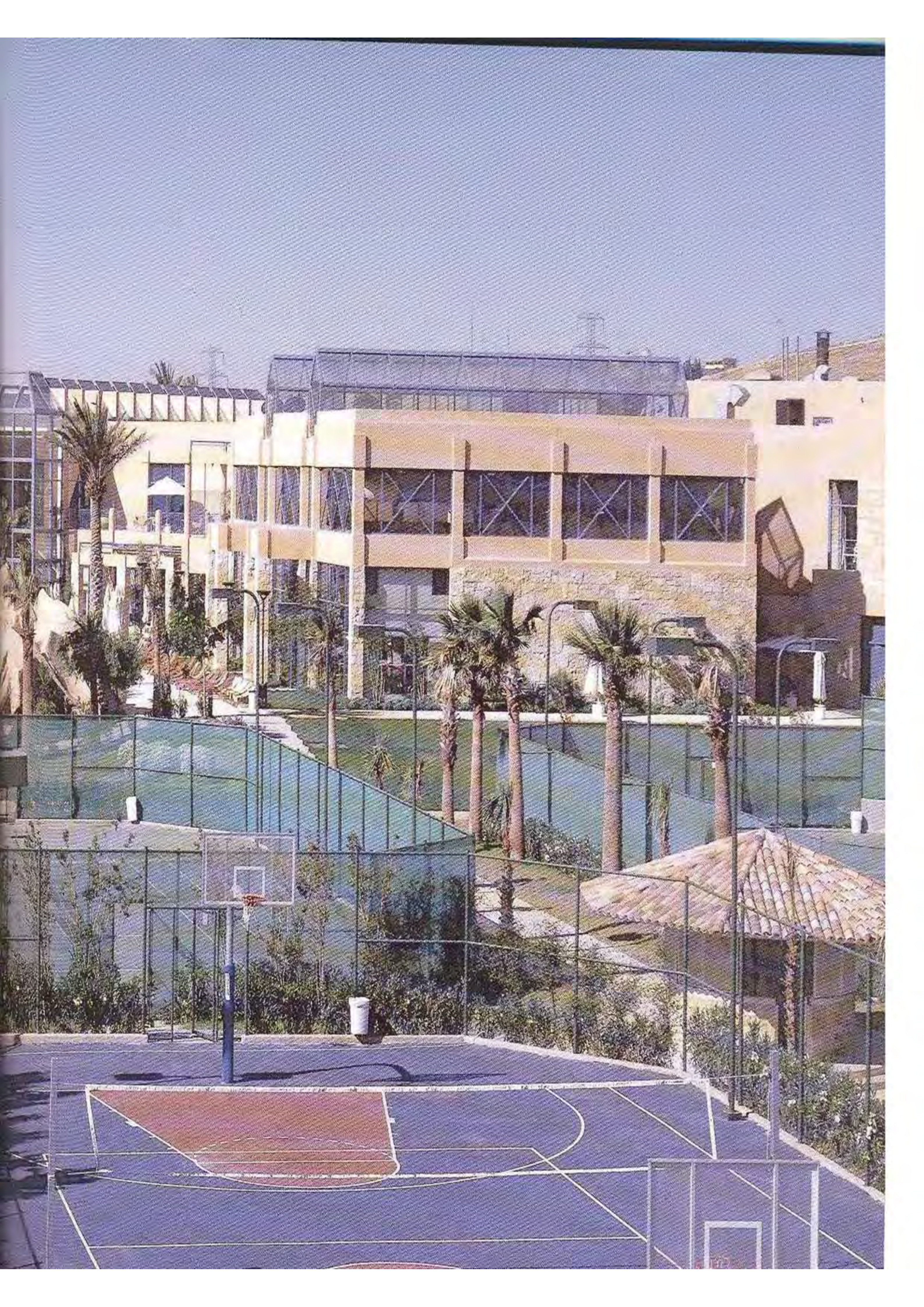
Wandering about these spaces, especially the central circus - a sort of dome-less Pantheon - Duby's words come to the mind: "In spite of what we may believe, people still love tales and legends; in short, they enjoy listening to stories (...) What they love in a story, I believe, is being reassured, while they project into it, about the fact that what they are living is a life. This fine dust of indefinite starts, of elusive reactions, all these incomplete glances, these unfinished movements, these fleeting words that do not belong to them and are crowded on their lips, all this anonymous multiplicity in which the duration of a day that has just finished dissolves, like all the others with which it blends, before opening the book we have decided to read that night; all this, as if in a book, in a few days will find its unity and become, even if it does not make sense, a life: a narrated life, a destiny."

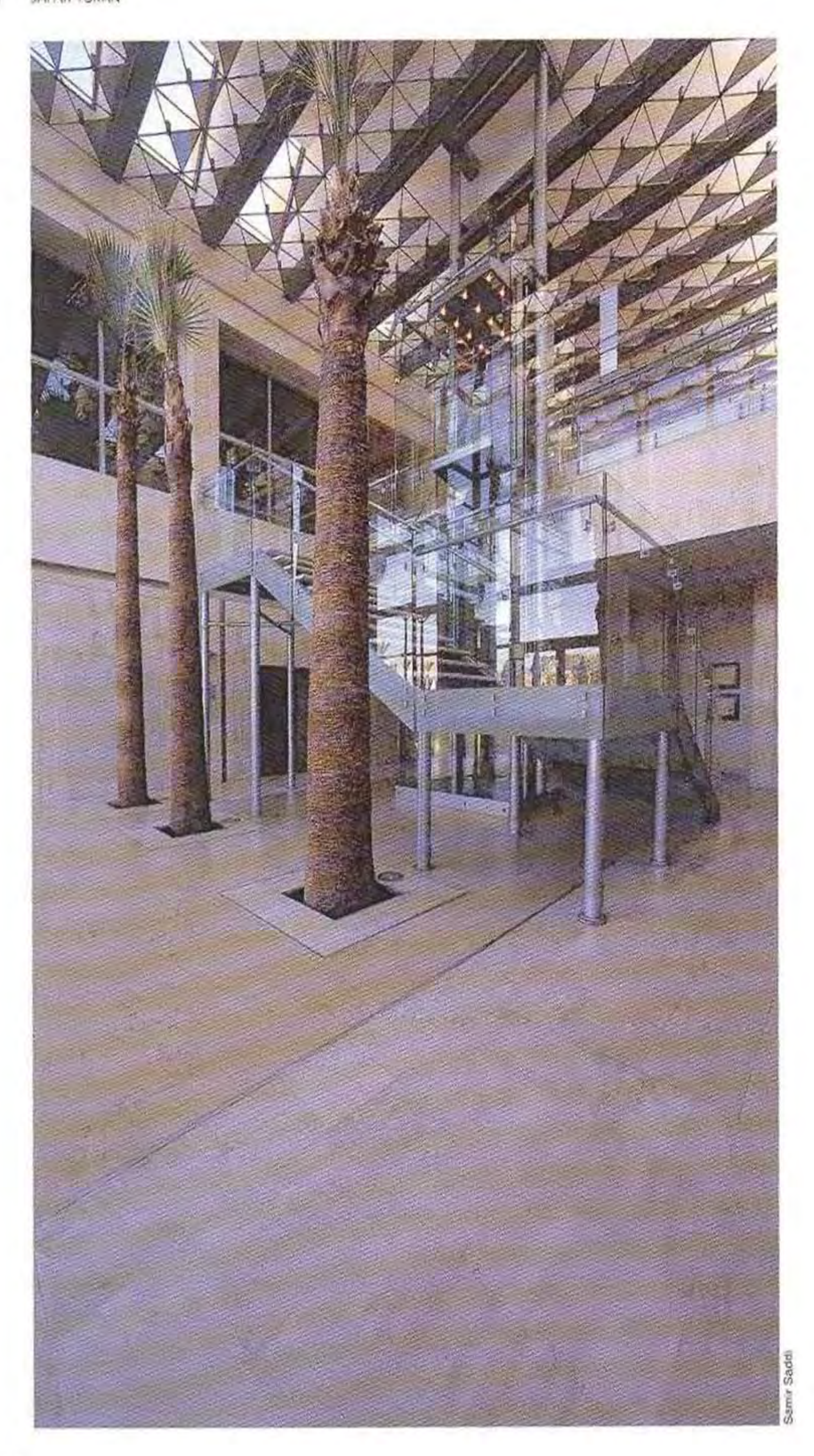


Samir Saddi




Samir Saadi




Samir Saddi

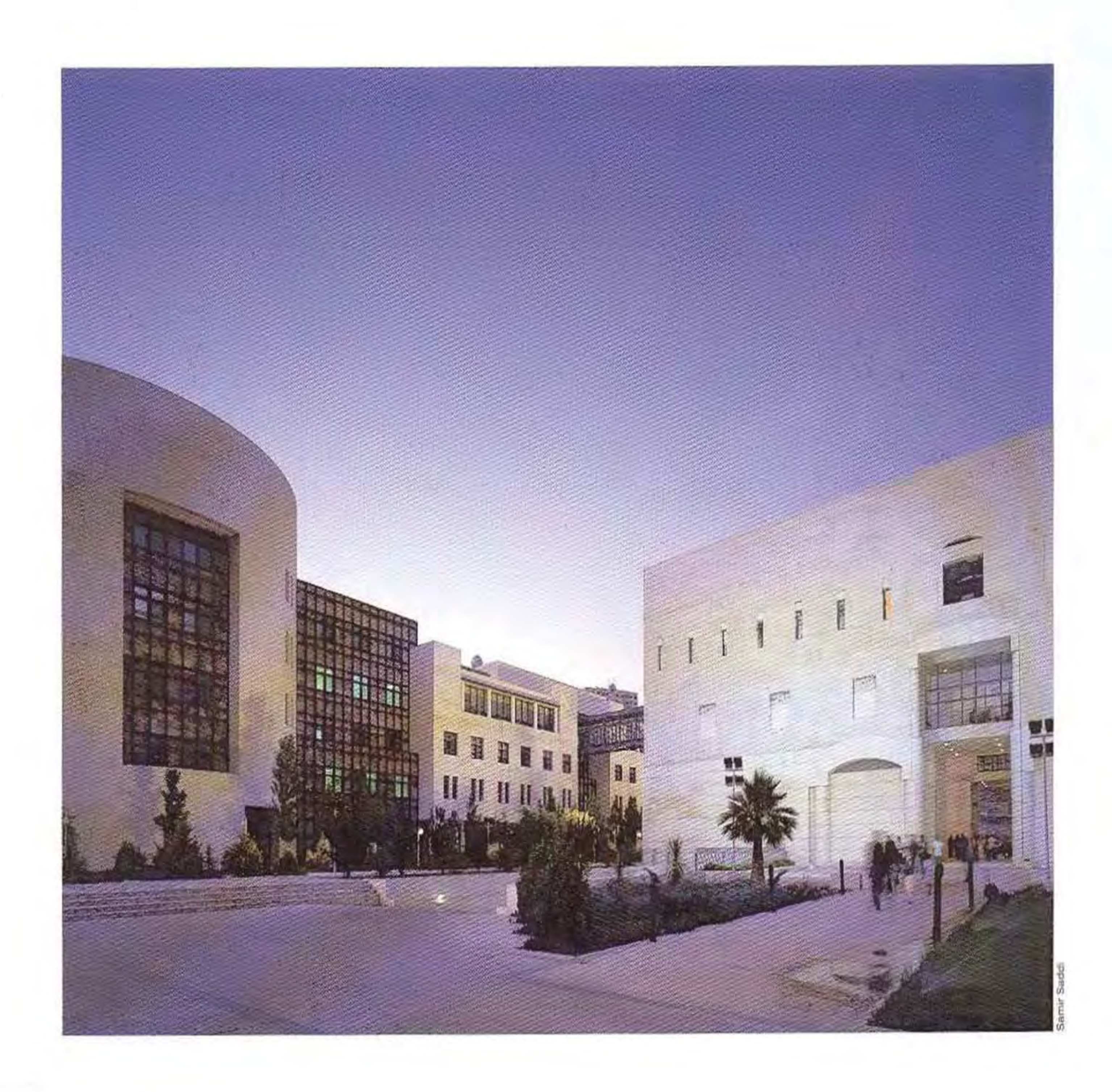
Dunes Club

In this work, our designers tell us a story: the story of a town hall open on all sides, to give the citizens more air, besides the possibility to see what is happening inside, to make the people to feel closer to the seat of power and to change that seat of power, which is often cloaked in darkness to conceal intrigue, into a transparent place. What stands out is the wish to open the places of power to the people, in order to carry on the slow and difficult process of modernising a nation without cancelling its memory, that lives on in the decoration of the building.

This is architecture's main goal.

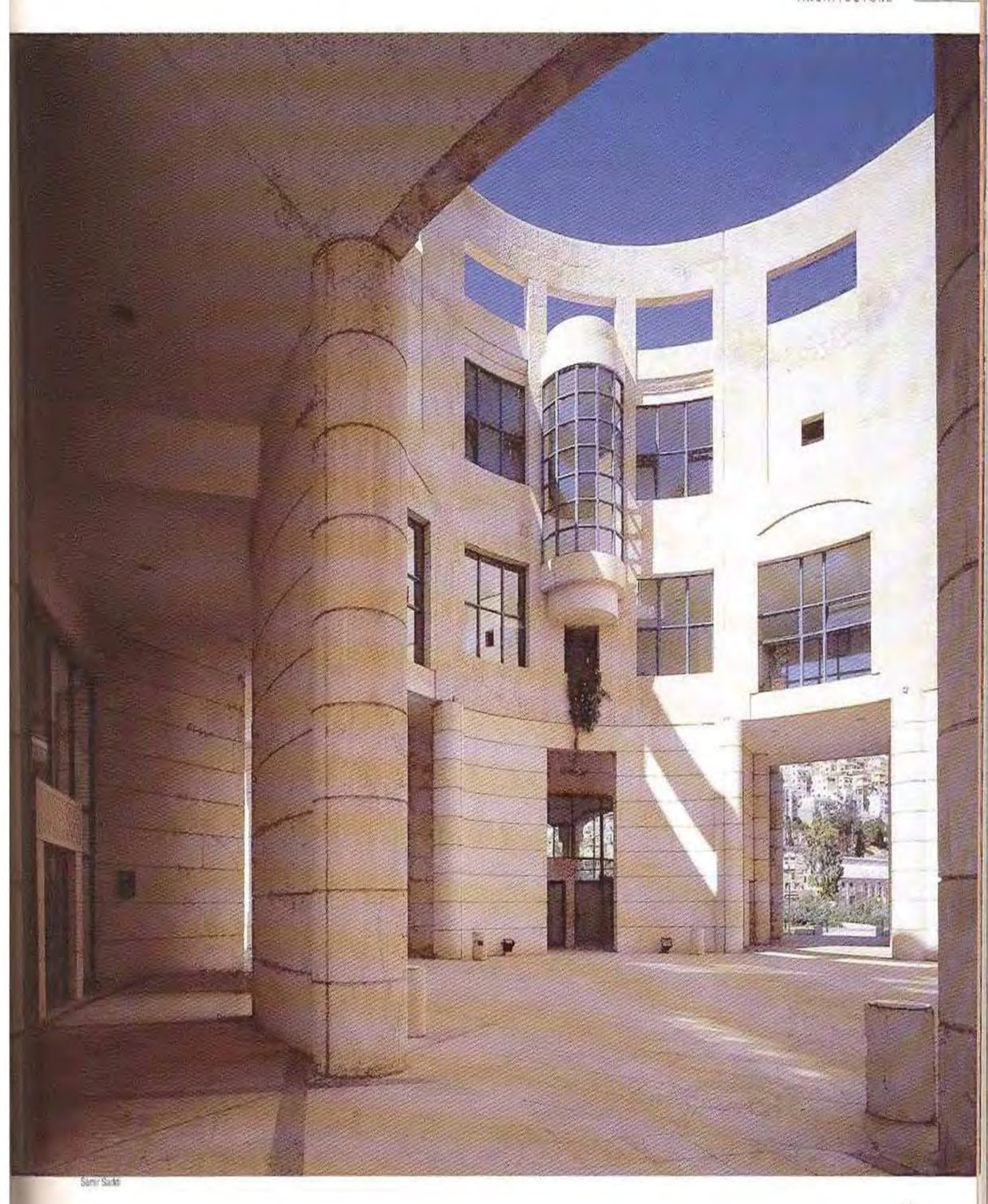
We would like to conclude this discussion of Jafar Tukan's production by mentioning briefly the works he has just finished, those unfinished and those that are still ideas, such as the visionary and intense project for the centre of Jerusalem which will open a fruitful debate on the future of architecture. This future is not disturbing, uncertain, confused or complex like the one foretold in films such as *Blade Runner*, but marked by the re-appearance of the "insula", one of the oldest examples of a built-up area, the symbol of a community of people meeting and living together in harmony. It is not by chance that this idea capable of communicating emotions, of making the soul tremble, has been envisioned for a city divided by religious differences - Jewish, Christian and Islamic - and consequently inhabited by a divided citizenry. The "insula", in spite of the word that suggests the idea of an island in the middle of the city, is not at all an isolated island in sea, but, as it was in Roman times, a choral community living around a courtyard. Today, in Tukan's fascinating project, it is a community of equals, of men and women showing tolerance for each other's ideas and living in peace and friendship in remembrance of their common origins and of their forefather Abraham.

Few people believe that architecture can contribute to the peace and welfare of a community. The author, also thinking of what is now happening in Berlin after the fall of the wall, is convinced that this is exactly what troubled and beautiful cities like Jerusalem need right now.



Samir Saddi

Amman City Hall



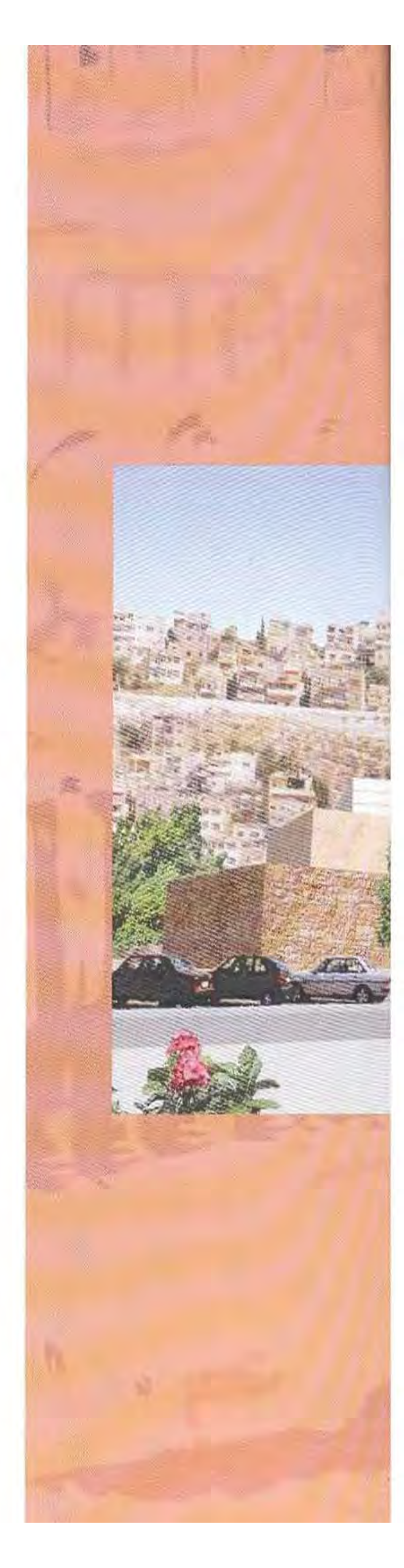
Samir Sadek

Among the works we have not mentioned yet are the Jordan Bank and Villa Qattan. In either case Tukan shows he has completed his rite of passage and reached the finishing line, not only in his houses, where he conjures up ancient household gods, paying attention as well to the needs of modern man who, during his daily toils dreams of an oasis; but also in his office blocks, where work is not seen as a form of slavery and sacrifice but as the gratifying task of producing wealth.

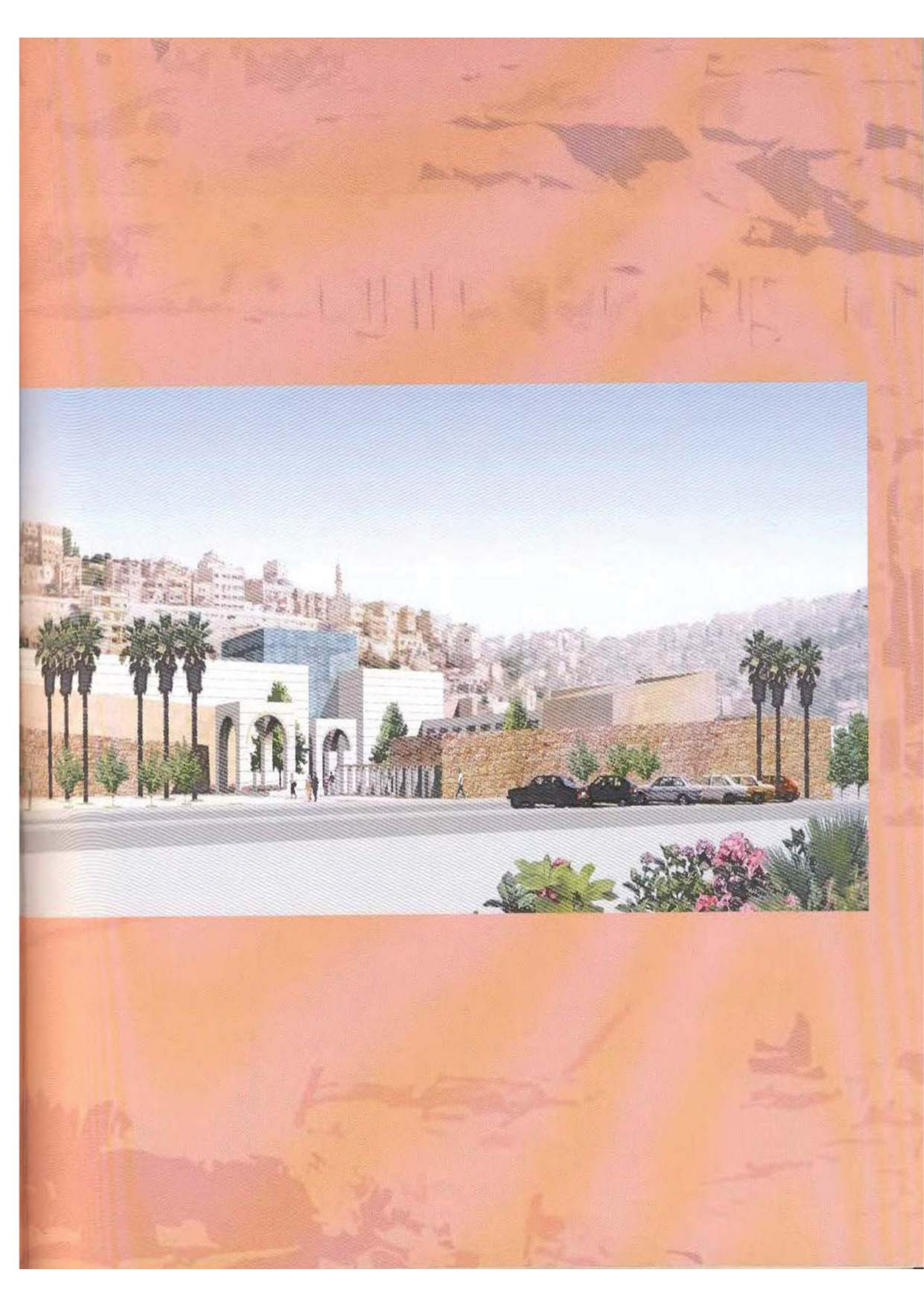
Finally, there is the Museum in downtown Amman. A building that cannot go unnoticed both for the beautiful texture of its stone reaching a truly moving expressiveness and for the message it carries: all the knowledge and flavour of the past cannot just make way for the new, the two must start a fruitful dialogue that will allow mature experience to advance.

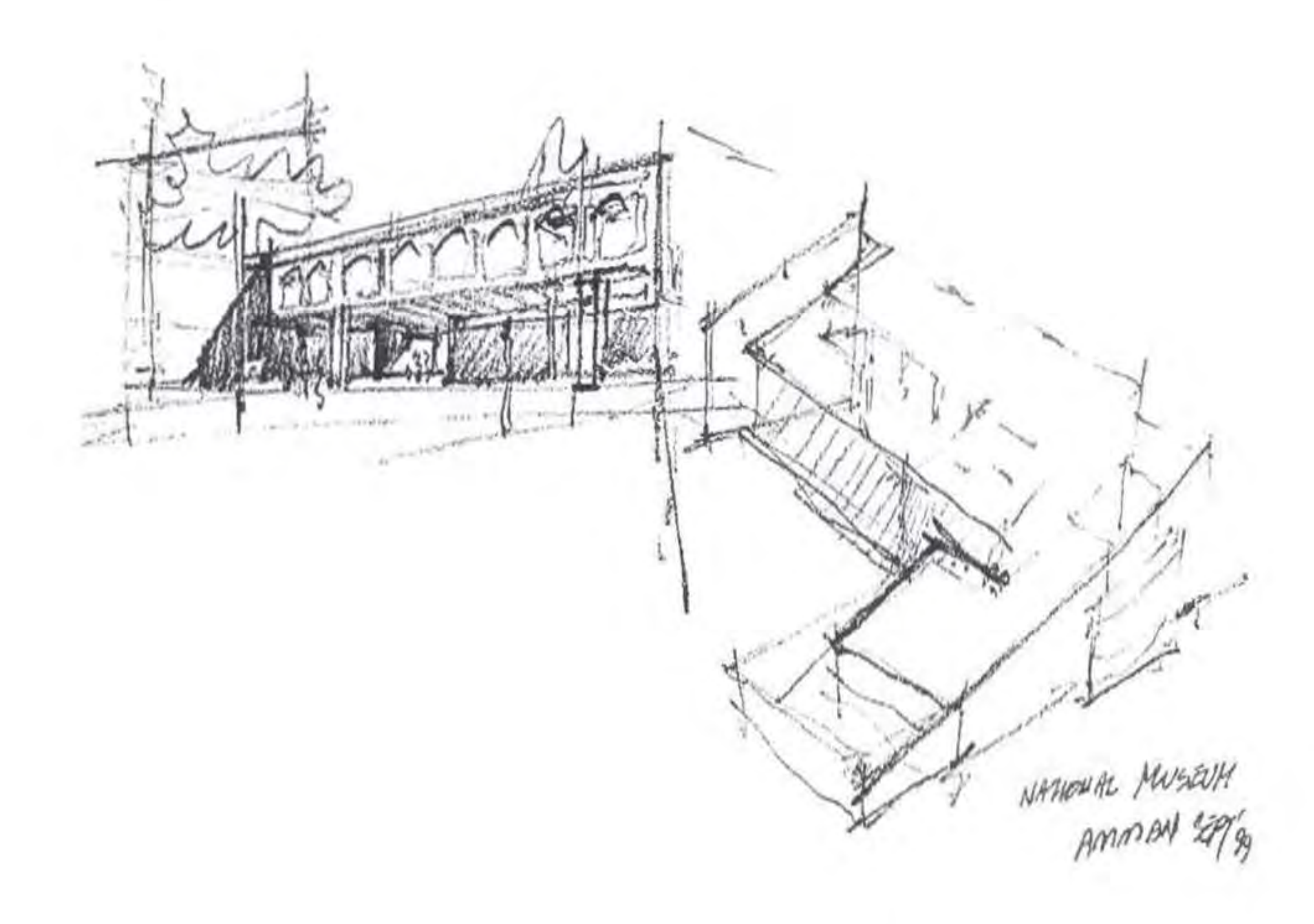
Thanks to his undoubted personal skills, our architect has also been commissioned the project for the 200-hectare park dedicated to the late king Hussein. Also with this project, Tukan might become the founder of a school that is anchored to tradition but, at the same time, is not willing to give up modernity and experimentation to be able to talk about the times in which we are living.

In conclusion, and remembering not only all those who helped me in this work, but also the smells and the sensations produced by jasmine-covered walls, the balance between green spaces and buildings, the rich flavours of this city and of other cities of the Arab world, I cannot help thinking that the Arab culture brings a special contribution to the world. Of course, every people has its own traditions that cannot be cancelled by the process of globalisation. I am deeply convinced that the culture expressed by the Jordanians, through people like Jafar Tukan as regards architecture, represents a wealth for all mankind, a gift to the world, to all those who can and want to appreciate it, convinced that *post tenebra lux.*



National Museum




NATIONAL MUSEUM
AMMAN SEPT/99

SELECTED WORKS



Sameer Saddi

Al-Masood Tower

Abu Dhabi – U.A.E.
1986

The tower, for our world of images, is the vertical sign *par excellence*, symbol of elevation and of decline. For an architect, building a tower means, more than on any other occasion, designing against the sky. The tower by definition is, after all, that which frees itself from the confusion of the city to take on a role which is, at the same time, an elevated point of view and an element visible from long distances.

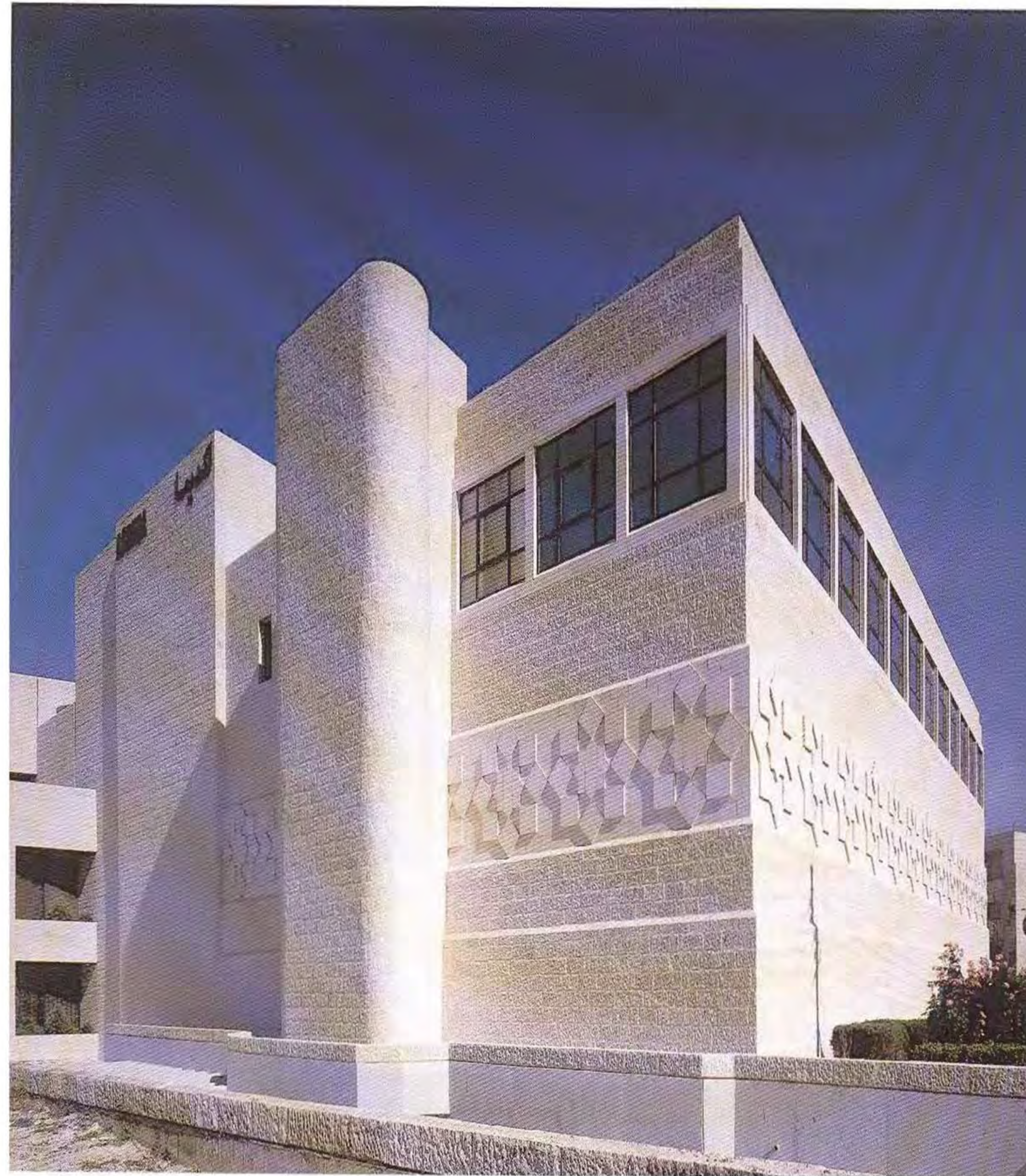
In this case, the office building is located in one of the most prestigious business areas of downtown Abu Dhabi, equipped with all the most modern facilities required both by international and local companies operating in Abu Dhabi.

The architect, sensitive to the particular problems of buildings of this type, was especially concerned with the issues of flexibility and construction quality. The tower is twenty storeys high and contains commercial spaces on the ground floor and mezzanine; parking is on the underground levels.

The building site is situated along a main commercial street flanked by modern high-rise buildings, and its size and shape are dictated by building regulations.

This is the first time in the U.A.E. that such a tall building has been equipped with an underground parking garage and built entirely of structural steel clad in satin-finish aluminum panels. Ground floor columns are embellished by stainless steel cladding. Tukan employs these elements in order to achieve speed and precision in construction and durability, and the result is a strong architectural image that inspires its end-users.


Sameer Saadi



Sameer Saddi

Arab Company for Drug Industries and Medical Appliances

ACDIMA – Amman, Jordan
1987

A competition was organized by the owners who invited a group of selected Jordanian architects to submit their designs, and that of *Jafar Tukan & Partners* was chosen as the winner. After some minor modifications, the designers set about preparing the working drawings and documents. While Amman's municipal building regulations and budget limitations greatly influenced the dimensions and finishes, the building's location and function, along with the company's image, were the project's inspiration: rather introverted and closed, like an Arabian home, designed to resist the harshness of the environment, but also to reveal a warm and welcoming interior.

The building is made up of two main sections. The first one houses the administrative offices and the cafeteria and, thanks to deep-set windows, easily manages the few hours of morning sun and faces onto a quieter street. The more technical part, exposed to the south and west, has solid walls with no openings to protect from the intense light and noise of the main street.

The site is located in a residential area, near a shopping mall. The semi-official nature of the company, under the economic cooperation charter of the Arab League, spurred the architect to create a design that could be woven into the residential fabric of the area while maintaining a dignified and clear image of what it represents.

The interior atrium, a sort of glazed courtyard or covered square, is the heart of the project around which the various other components are arranged. Stone is a typical building material in Amman and its highly advanced decorative use here on the facades, along with the sky-lit interior spaces, seems to achieve an architecture able to express traditional concepts in a modern way.

The project acquires its importance from the fact that it combines commercial utility with interesting architectural shapes and a sympathetic harmony with its surroundings. Added to this is the attempt to make interesting use of obligatory set-backs for public areas that encourage opportunities for meeting and dialogue.

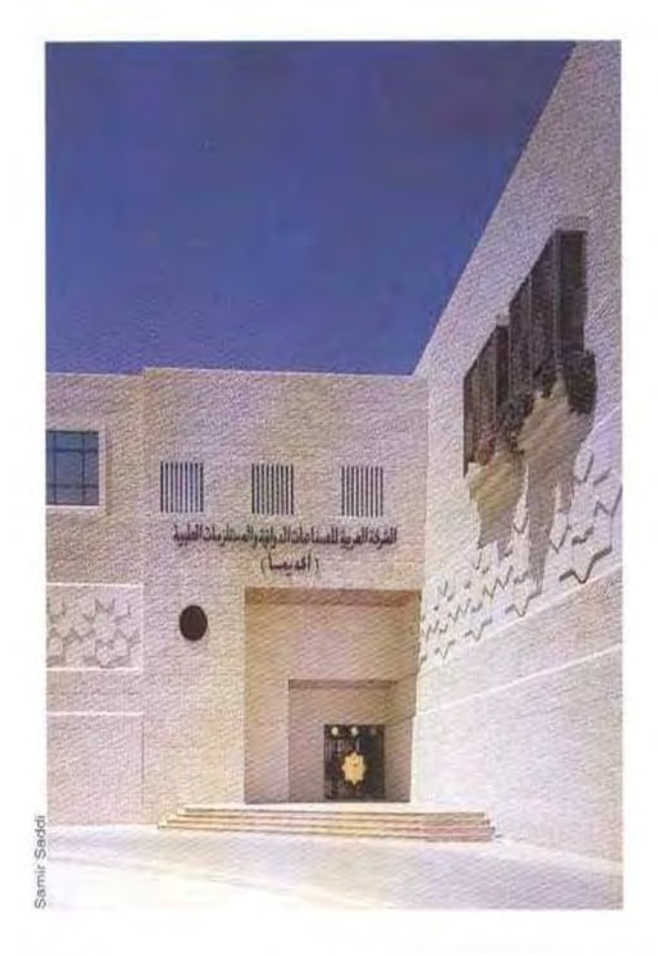
Tukan knew well the writings of William Morris, which he applied in this case as well: "Each of us is committed to watching over and protecting the portion of the earthly landscape we are responsible for, each with his own spirit and hands, so as not to hand down to our children a lesser treasure than the one left us by our fathers."

The overall design is unmistakably contemporary yet exhibits a strong sense of belonging to its environment.




قال عليه الصلاة والسلام
تداووا عباد الله ، فإن الله
ما أنزل من داء إلا أنزل له دواء

Samir Saddi



Samir Saddi



Sa'eed Nusaiba



Samir Saddi

SOS Children's Village

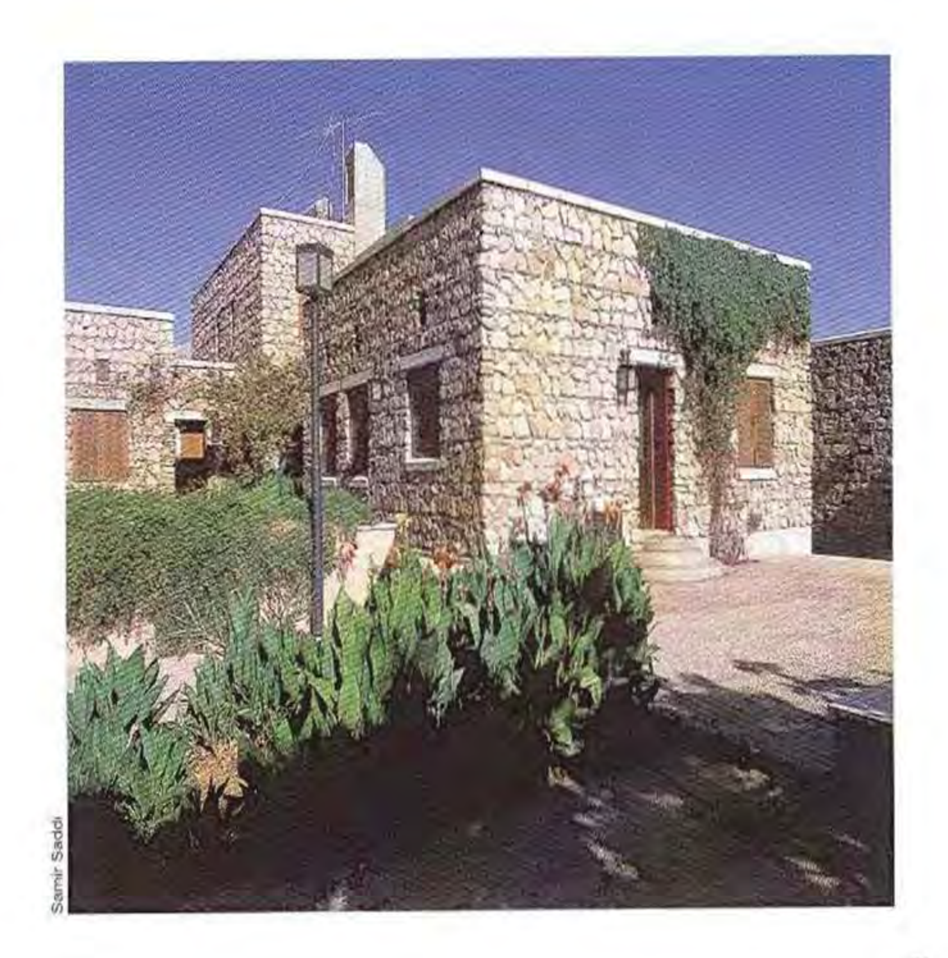
Aqaba, Jordan
1990

This is one of Jafar Tukan's most intense and richly poetic architectural works, revealing his mission on behalf of the disinherited and, in this case, of abandoned children. Here the terms of architecture seem to have undergone a series of chemical reactions which have brought out its hidden values, allowing him to formulate new scenarios as vehicles of meaning.

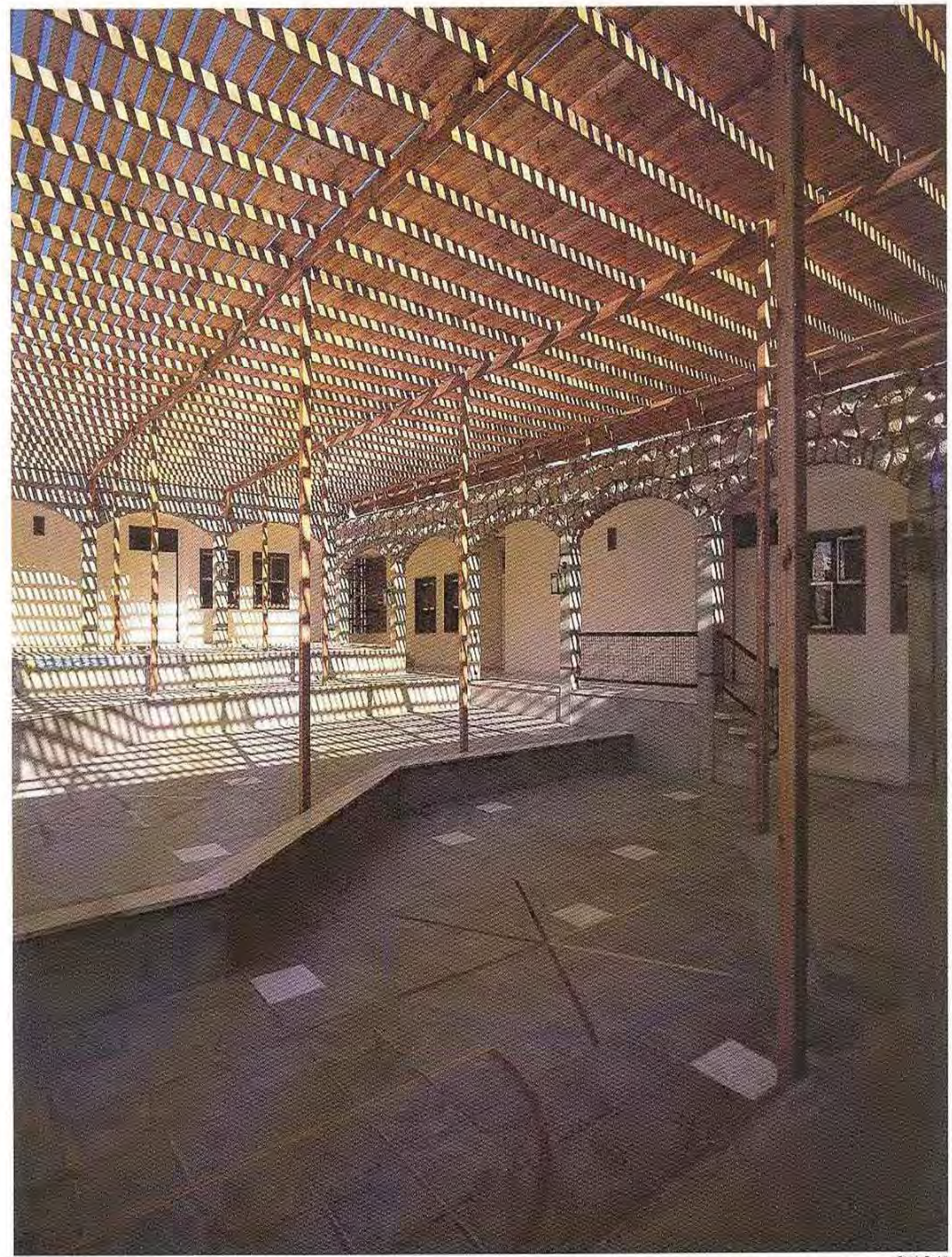
The SOS Children's Village is made up of eight family houses, accommodation for the staff and administration, a facilities building, and a nursery school which can be employed for various uses. All buildings are of the same height creating a typically village-like atmosphere. For economic reasons all exterior walls are clad in local Aqaba stone, while the framing of the openings is in locally-produced cement.



Samir Saddi

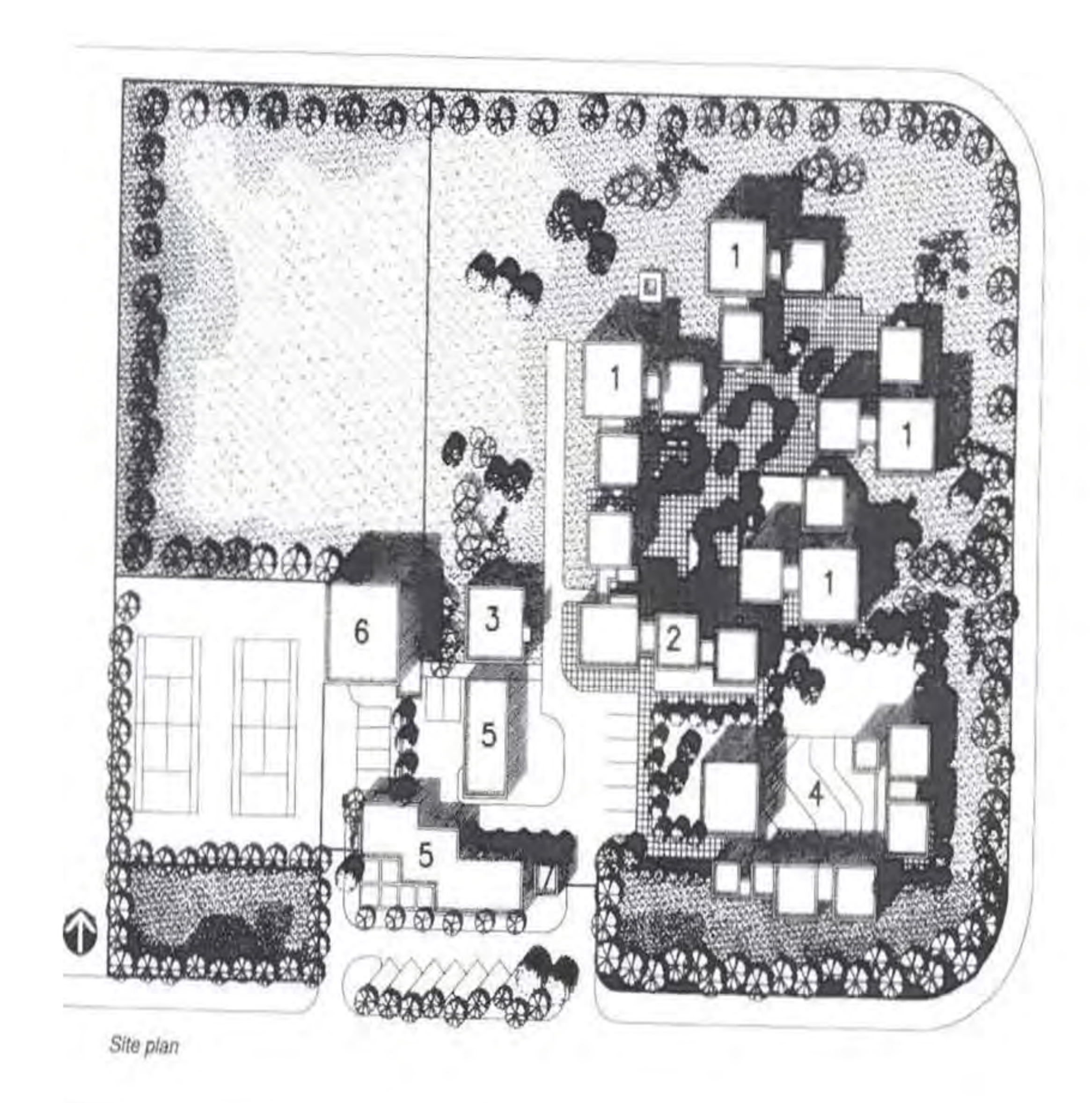


Samir Saddi



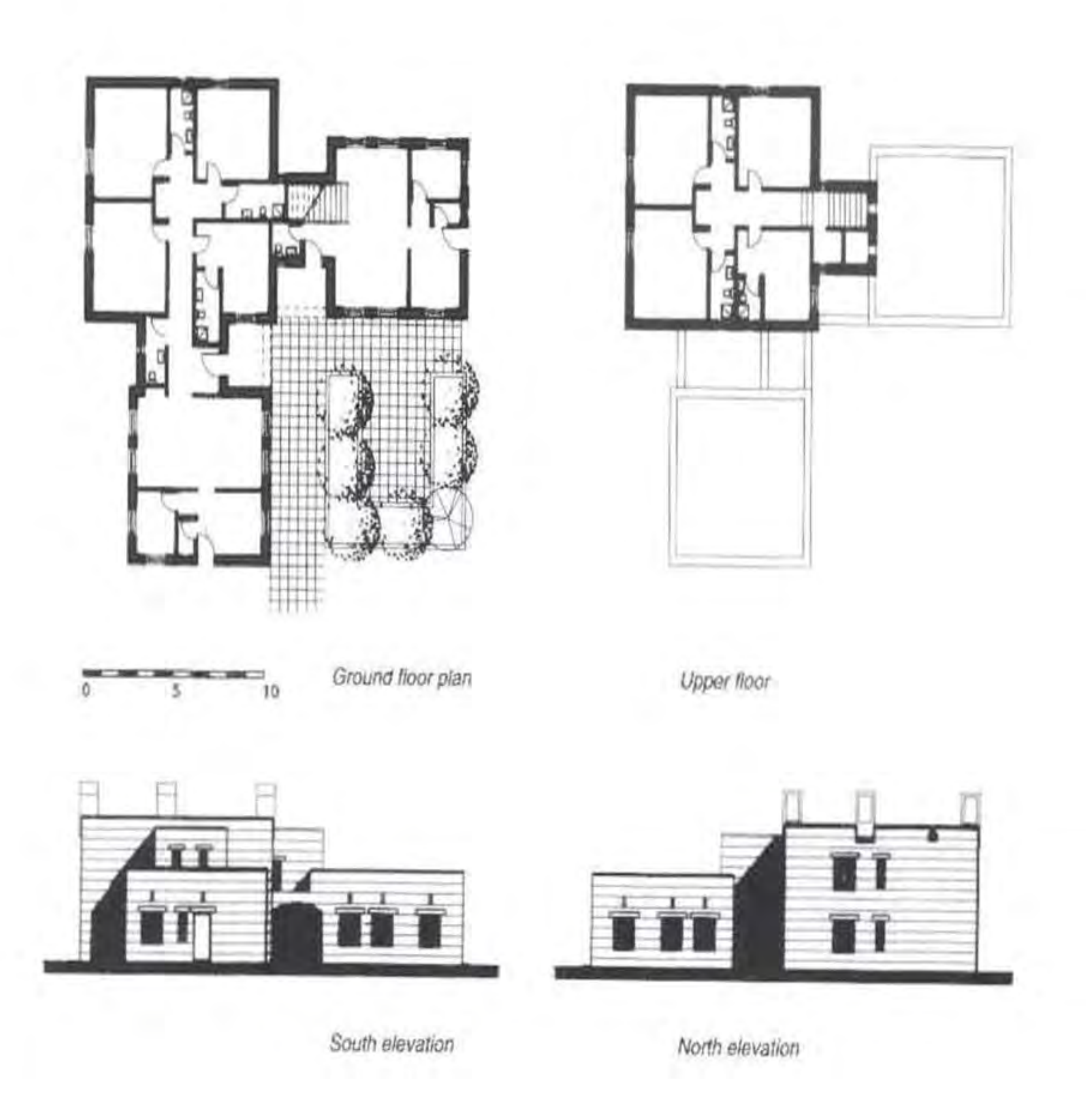
Samir Saddi





Site plan

1 - Typical family house
2 - Administration guest 1 director's house
3 - Staff house
4 - Kindergarten
5 - Service building
6 - Sports hall
7 - Gate house



Ground floor plan

Upper floor

South elevation

North elevation



Arab Insurance Company

Amman, Jordan
1991

A circular opening marks one extreme of the main facade of this compact and austere building, a sort of great eye placed in homage to Louis Kahn and the architecture of Illuminism. Through that void a green terrace can be seen, an oasis of peace and tranquility protected from the chaos of the metropolis. Apart from being a silent tribute to nature, this is also the hopeful desire for a return to man's serene co-existence with his environment, his Mother Earth.

Designed to house the company's head offices, it is a building with five floors above ground and two parking levels underground.

The site where it is located, and its pre-established shape, influenced its overall volume, which is embellished by the special treatment of the facade: fine details such as the splayed windows, to evenly distribute light, the corner solutions that reinforce the compact outer envelope, the base that roots the structure to the ground and its relationship with the sky into which its volume clearly cuts.

Especially interesting is the main entrance which truly invites one into the building and guarantees the client a hospitable image.



Samir Saddi



ADNOC-FOD Headquarters Building

Abu Dhabi, U.A.E.
1996

The modern city of Abu Dhabi dates back to the mid-1960s. It was designed on a primarily rectangular grid with fairly rigid square and rectangular lots. The building regulations for the greater downtown business district allow for buildings with twenty above-ground floors that rise above the area of the site at the ground floor and the mezzanine levels, and above which a projection of 1.5m all around is allowed. In the last ten years a decree has been issued requiring all buildings to exhibit a distinctly Islamic style in their design.

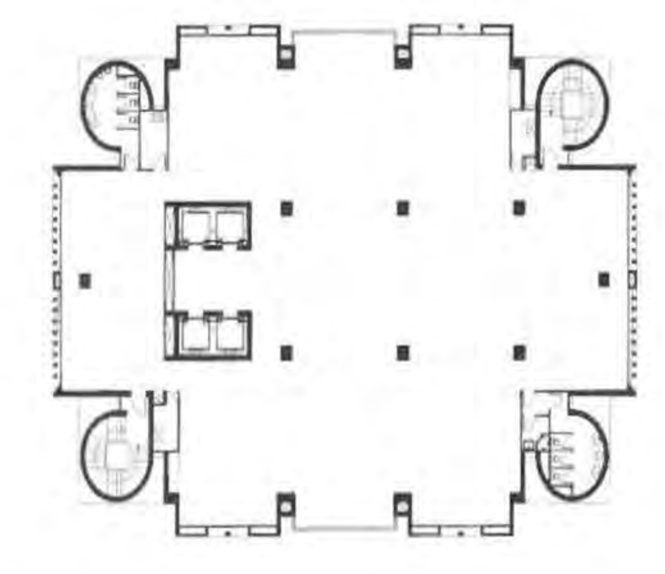
The monotony of the sizes and shapes of the plots, the rigidity in the building regulations, and the superficiality in the interpretation of "Islamic" style (mainly arches and arabesques) has made of architecture an exercise in two-dimensional design resulting in a jungle of architectural chaos. The challenge faced in designing the ADNOC-FOD Building was to be able to carve out of the prevailing banality a building that is distinctly modern yet which exhibits a regional flavor reflecting the traditional architecture of the place: generally of white-washed mud construction with small openings in order to keep the hot sun out while simultaneously using it to highlight intricate or simple reliefs carved into the surface of the mud.

The lot in question is rectangular in form. The stair and service cores were placed in the four cylindrical towers at the corners of the building, leaving the office floors fully open.

The building's base was clad in gray granite with a relief motif derived from a traditional regional one.

The general treatment of the facade clearly reflects the three main structural bays, with the glazed central bay dedicated to the offices of department directors. The two side bays house other office spaces. The treatment of the openings in these bays varies from louvers on the lower floors to twin windows on the upper, in order to create some visual variety but also to open up a more uninterrupted view for the upper floors.

The interior of the main entrance was meticulously detailed as a continuation of the exterior treatment of the base, with the use of gray granite and the same relief motif.



Typical floor plan



Samir Saddi

Amman City Hall

Amman, Jordan
1996

Elias Canetti, in his book *La provincia dell'uomo*, in speaking of the writer's job, asked: "What is urgency? That which he senses in the others and which the others cannot say; something that he himself must have sensed and recognized before finding it in the others. This agreement creates urgency. He must be capable of two things: of sensing and of thinking strongly and, with untiring passion, of listening to others and taking them seriously."

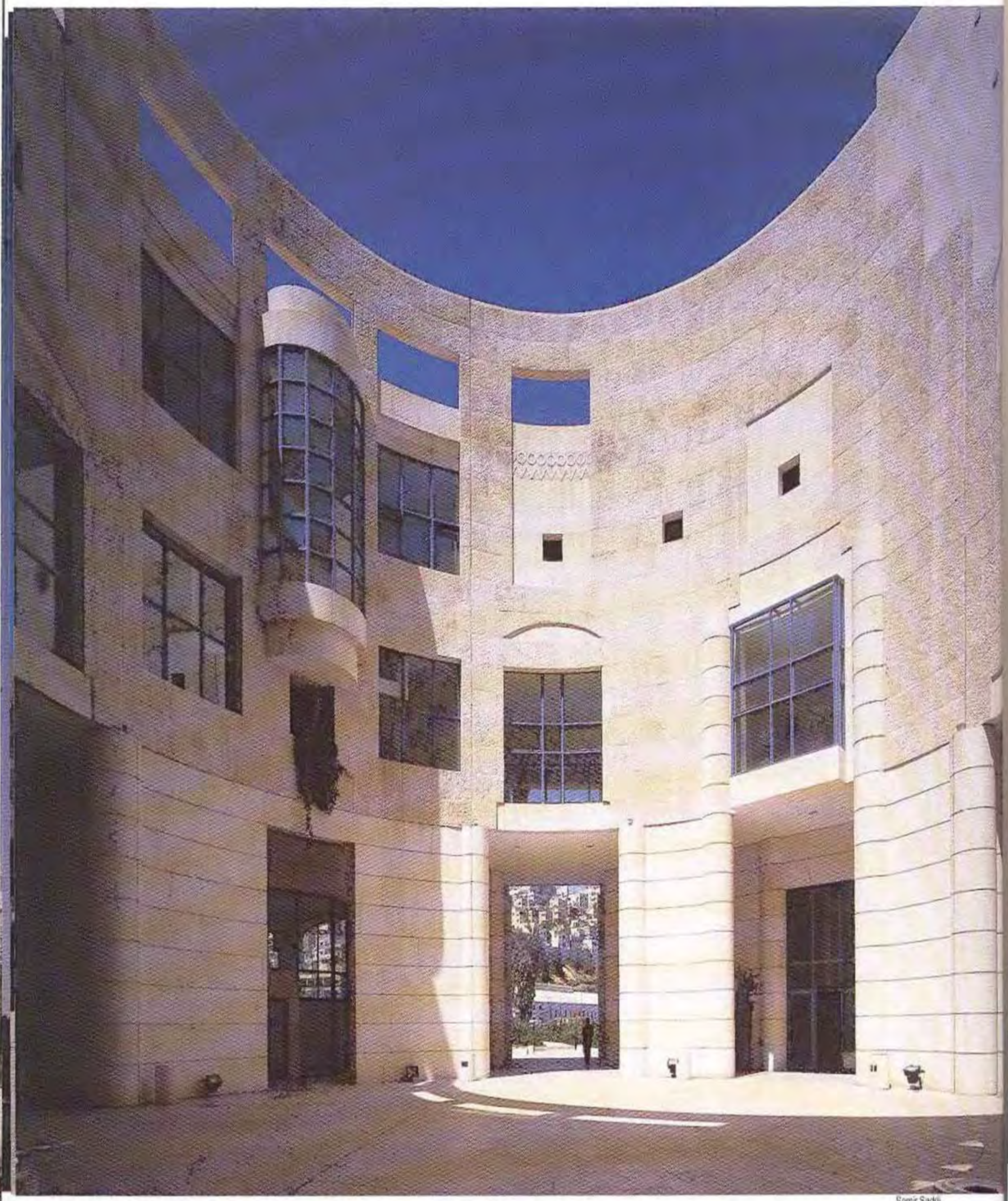
This quotation seems particularly appropriate in explaining what we sensed when visiting the project in question – witness to what the architect *senses in the others and which the others cannot say.* This project is the first phase of the City Hall Building. It houses the official part of the City Hall and includes the Mayor's office and the City Council chambers, as well as meeting rooms and senior staff offices.

The base of the building is made up of four segments placed around a courtyard. One of the segments is the main City Hall, and the other three house permanent public exhibition areas. The main entrance to the building is from a formal plaza which will also serve in the second phase of the project.

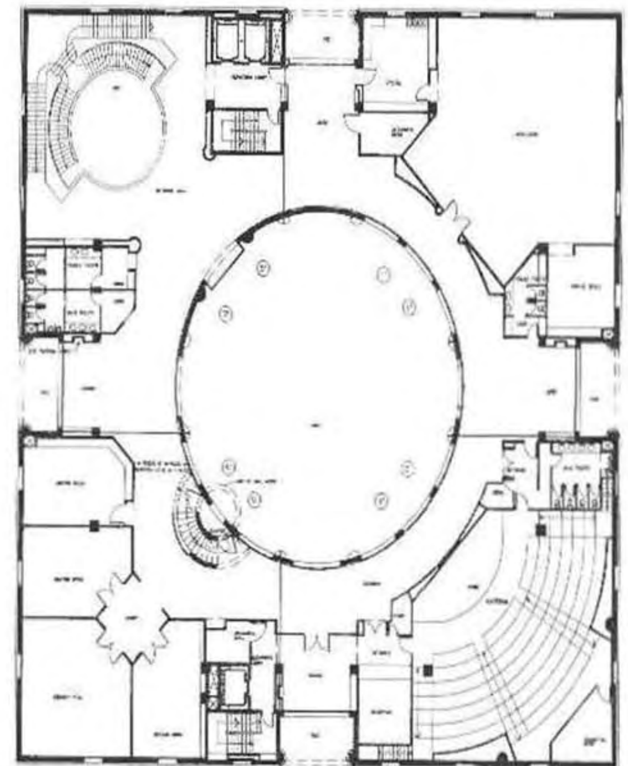
The site is part of the linear development of downtown Amman and is located in the Capital's historic area. Local limestone is the principal material, both externally and internally, with elegant and subtly applied detailing in traditional decorative patterns.



Section



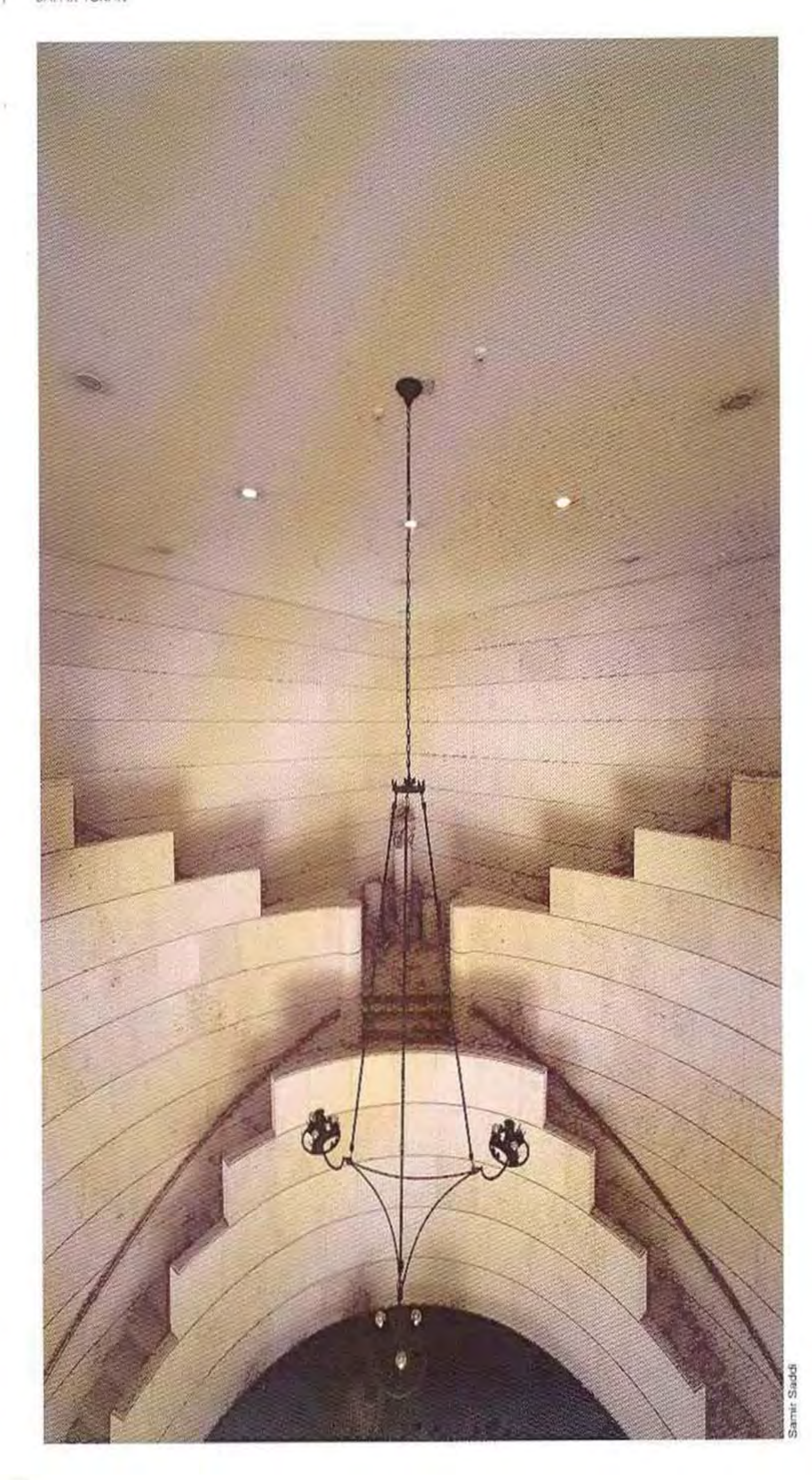
Samir Saddi



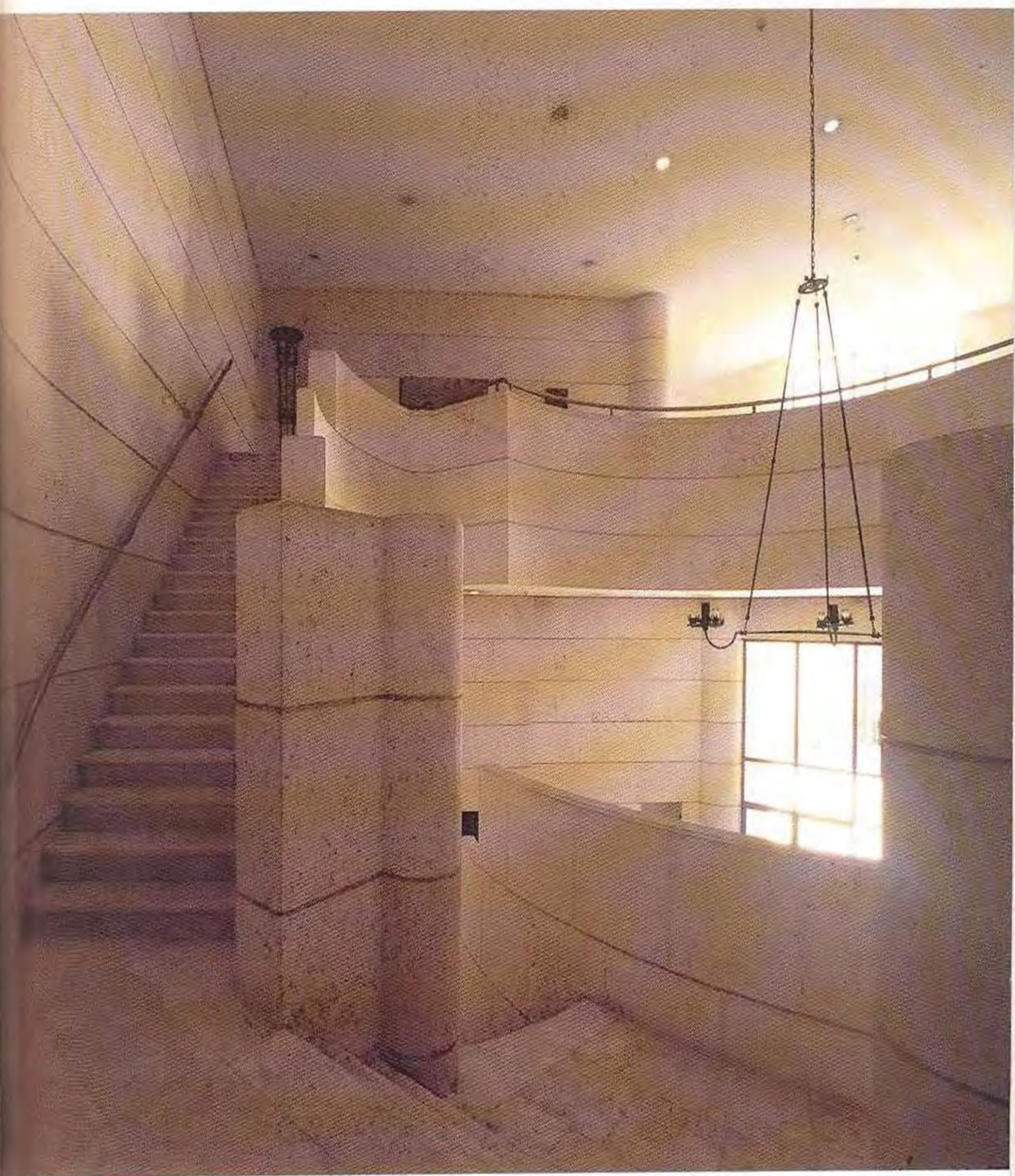
First floor plan



Samir Saddi



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Jordan Tower

Amman, Jordan
1997

The building was erected on the site of the earlier Al Burj Hotel, with its unusual circular shape, designed by architect Fuad Al-Sayegh and demolished a few years ago.

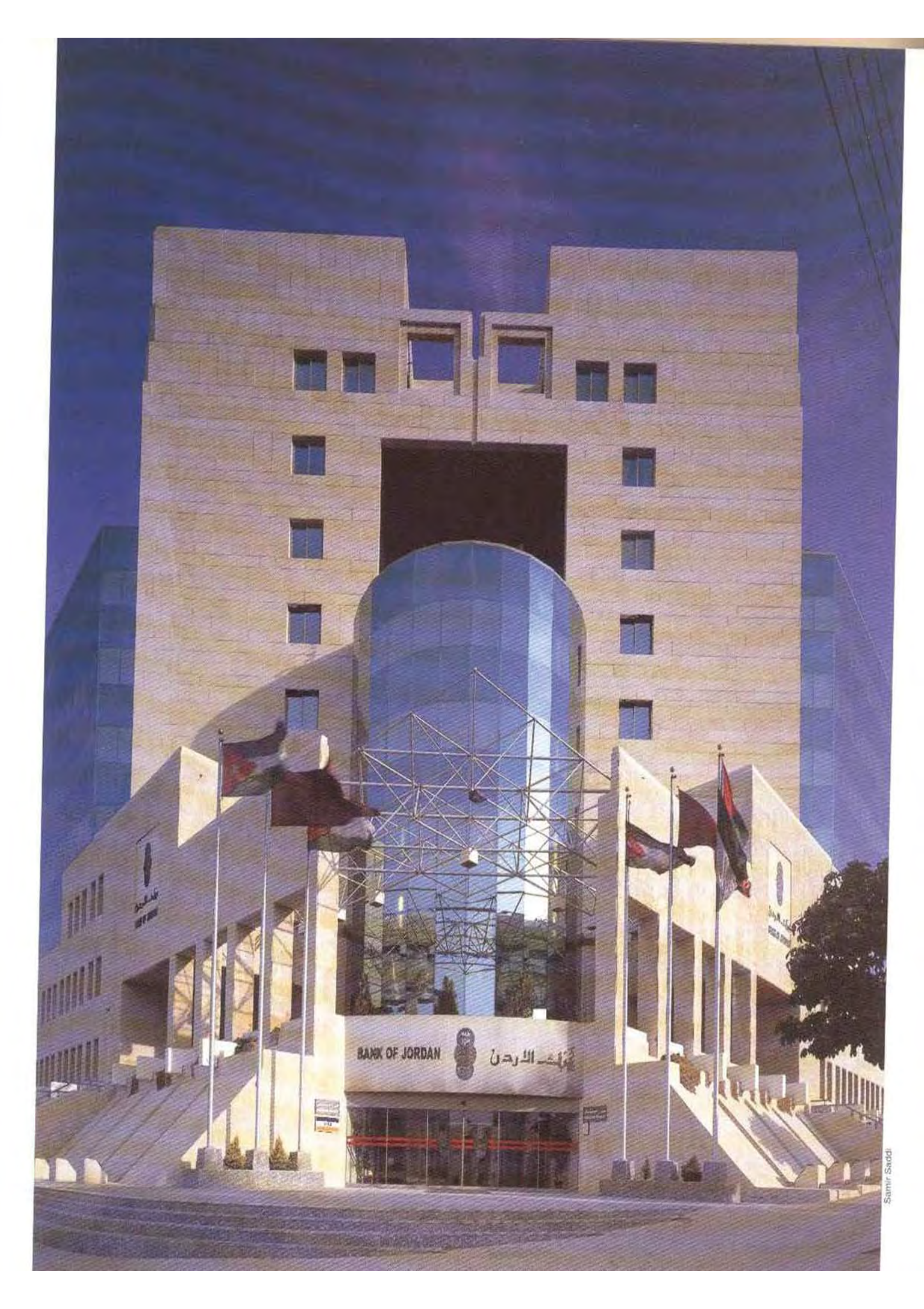
The building consists of six floors above ground and three below, the ground floor being reserved for shops. It stands out, at the intersection of two main streets, for its rather unusual tower which seems almost sculpted compared with the rest of the stone block. Its elevations are simple and linear.

The openings recall those used in the Arab Insurance building.

Particularly interesting is the approach to the surrounding sidewalk, designed to be in harmony with the building and follow the slope of the site.



Samir Saddi



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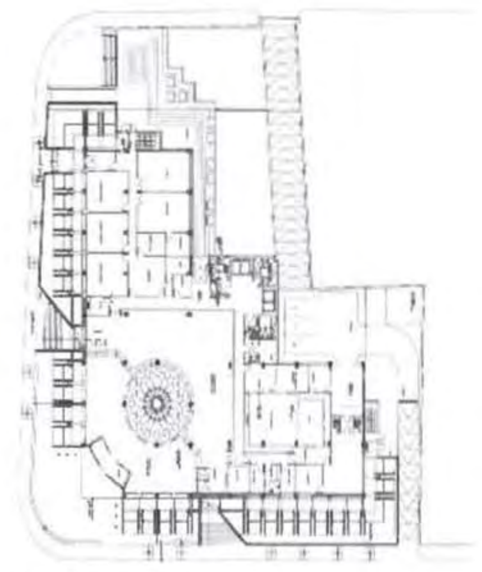
Bank of Jordan

Amman, Jordan
1997

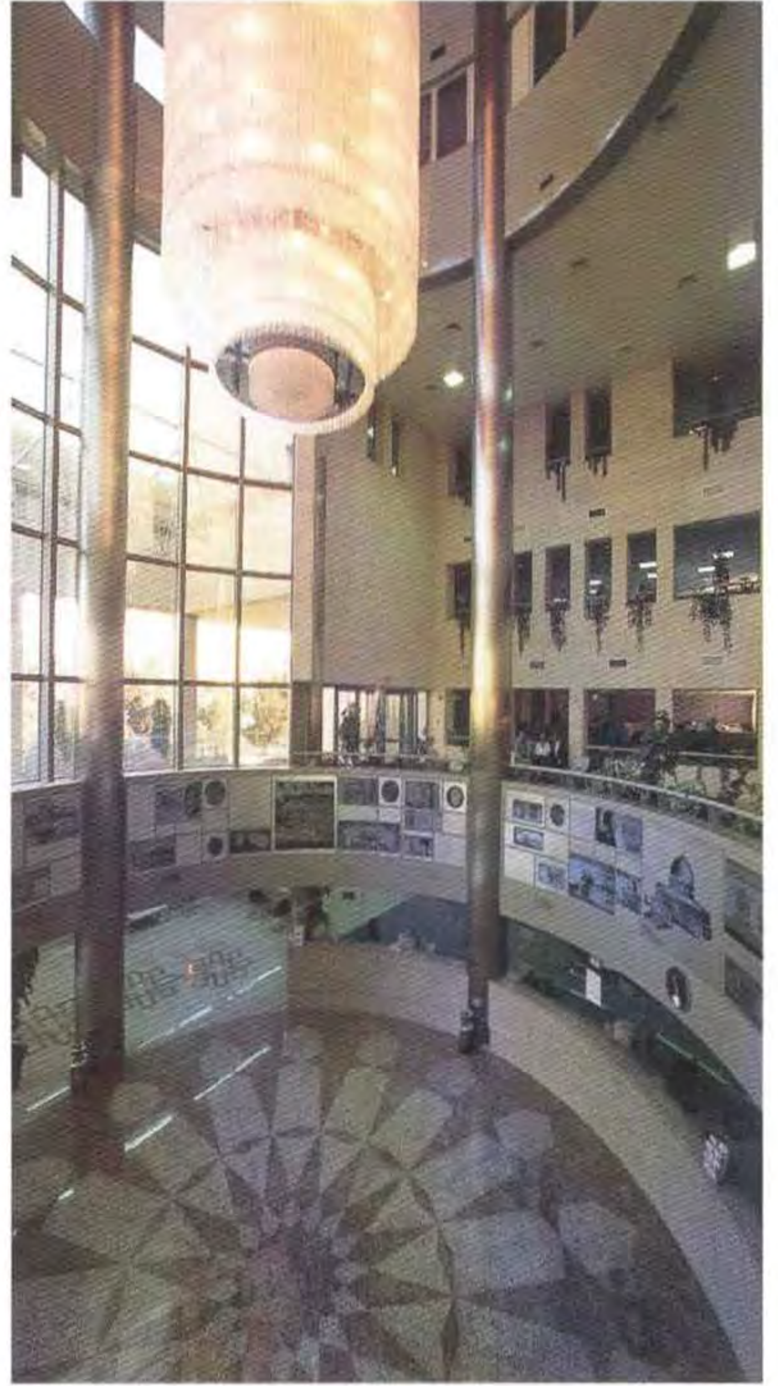
The bank rises nine storeys above the ground and three below. The first underground level is a parking area for one hundred cars, while the second houses a computer section.

The first underground level and ground floor are for public use, while the upper floors contain offices.

The building is clad in stone, marble and glass, and is equipped internally with sophisticated security and control systems and furnished in the best quality raised flooring, carpeting, partitions and office equipment.



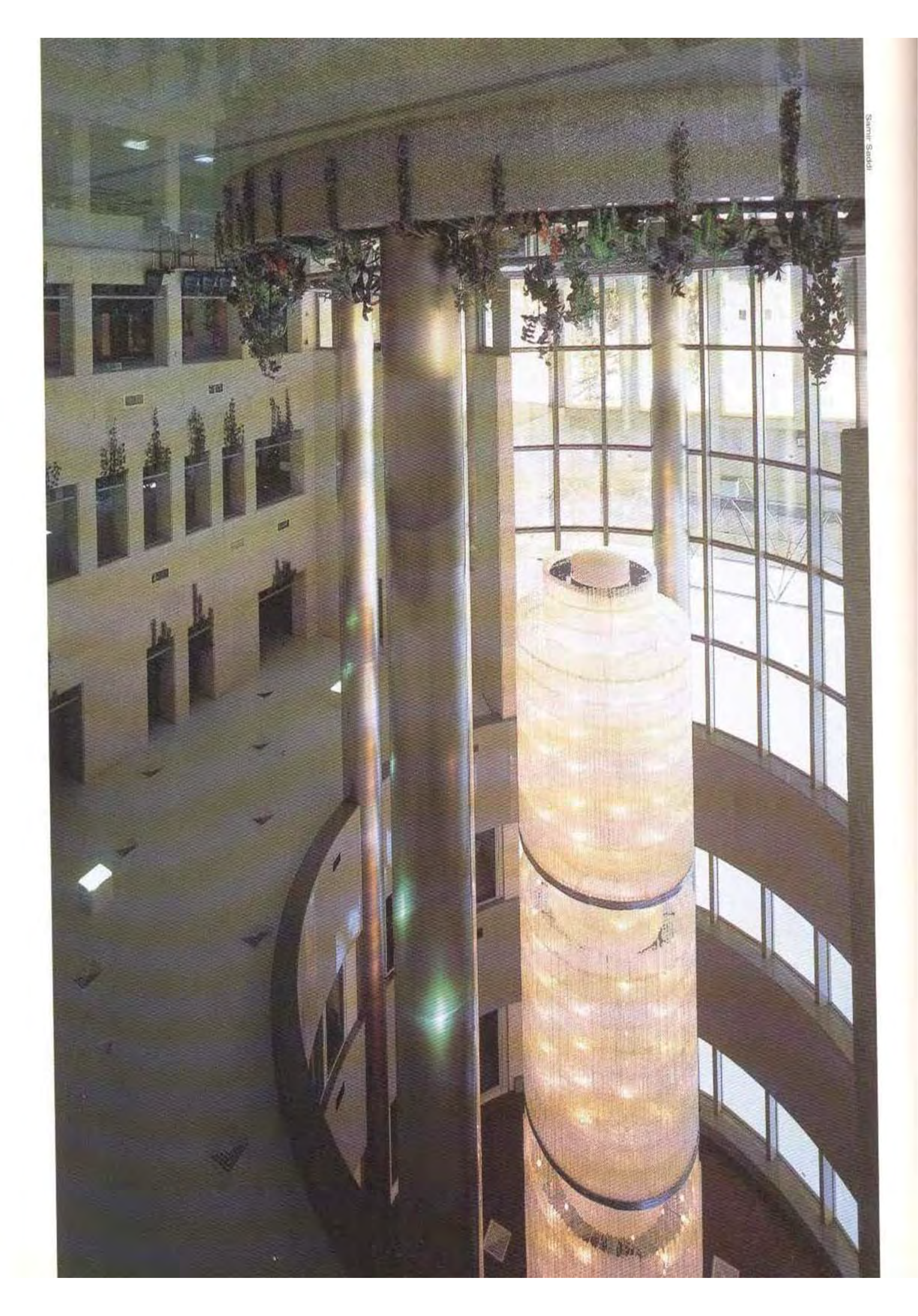
First floor plan



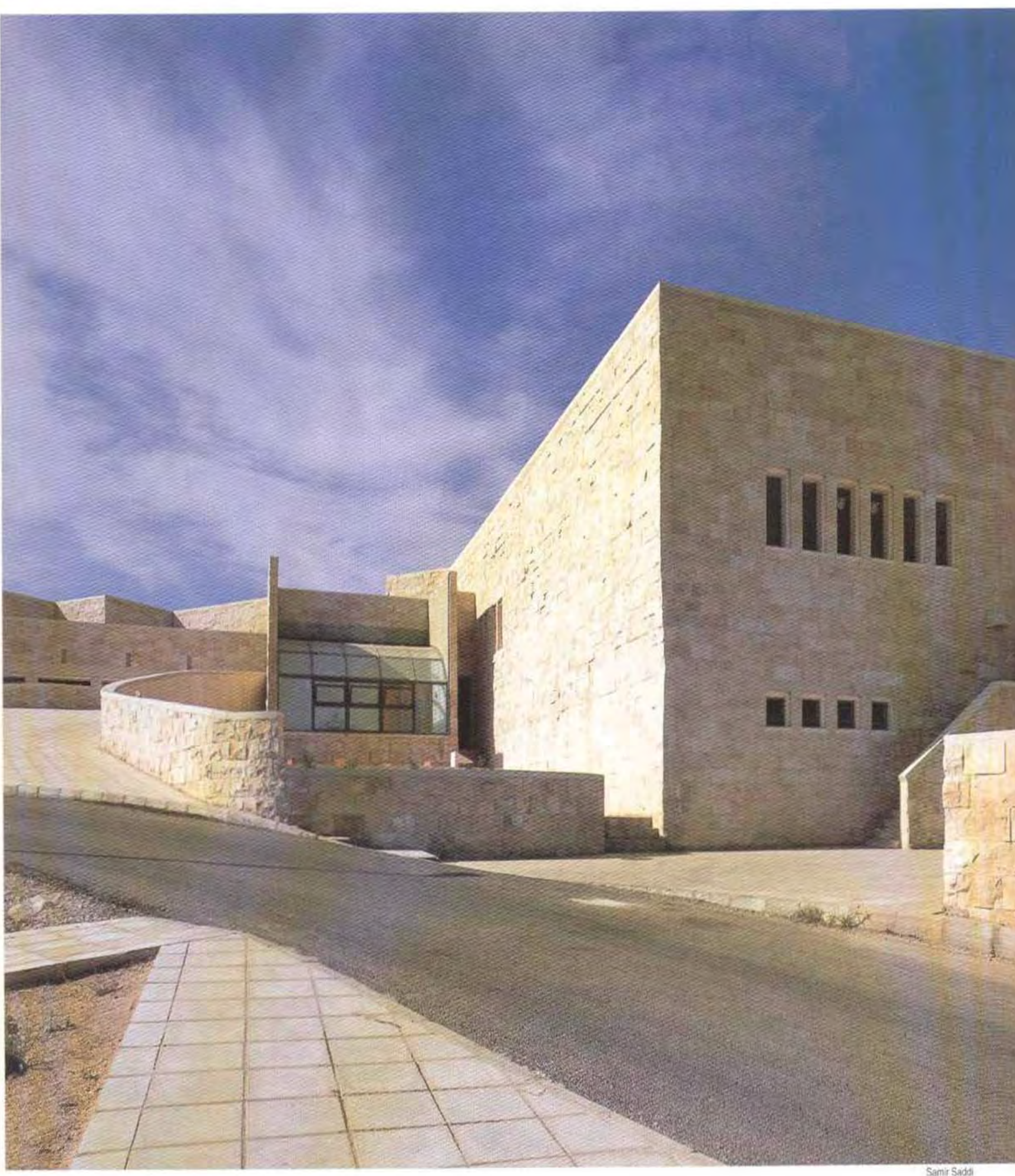
Samir Saddi



Samir Saddi



Samir Saddi



Samir Saddi

Jubilee School

Amman, Jordan
1998

The concept of the Jubilee School goes well beyond the creation of a residential campus accommodating an advanced educational institution. The designers have taken up the challenge of fusing the various motivations generated by a qualitative revolution in the educational system, and by its wide sociological and psychological spectrum, while at the same time responding to the characteristics and requirements of the site. The mandate to upgrade educational policies in general encompasses two aims: participation in real cultural and technical advancements going beyond their mere consumption, and recognition of cultural identity and national traditions as the basis upon which to build institutions and correlate them with the society.

The challenge, therefore, is to achieve an equilibrium between modernity and the preservation of origins - not an easy feat. It is one that requires study and constant evaluation throughout the design process in order to control the tendency to romanticize tradition. Functional design must be balanced by the traditional aspects that can contribute positively to the formation of cultural pride.

In the context of a project like the Jubilee School, various issues are encountered such as the creation of a living environment that satisfies the requirements of the program, and that provides a healthy and stimulating atmosphere for the moral and mental development of the individual. Emphasis is placed on quotation and adaptation of local indigenous architecture and site characteristics as appropriate in creating an environment suited to the needs of the design - a constructive dialogue between cultural origins and new developments in sight for the future. The design should be sensitive and respectful of the features of this rural site, especially regarding the topography and existing trees.

His Majesty, the late King Hussein, often stressed the need for Jordan's future leaders to interact with the world community without, however, losing respect for the traditions and distinctive qualities of Jordanian society.

The village as a native community is still an intact, living entity, with well-defined systems to deal with all the aspects of daily life. Being a member of the local community is of vital importance since it means participating in the processes of production; nevertheless, each member is still esteemed as a unique individual.

In the proposed design, the "village spirit" is considered as a distinct, and desirable, environment in which positive and formative qualities, which are later useful in school, can develop.

The combination of village, human scale, sense of place and homogeneity with the environment is the most important characteristic that we hope to find throughout the design process. In light of this, the following comment, made at a gathering of architects and scholars under the auspices of the Aga Khan Architectural Study Program, could be read as a kind of warning:

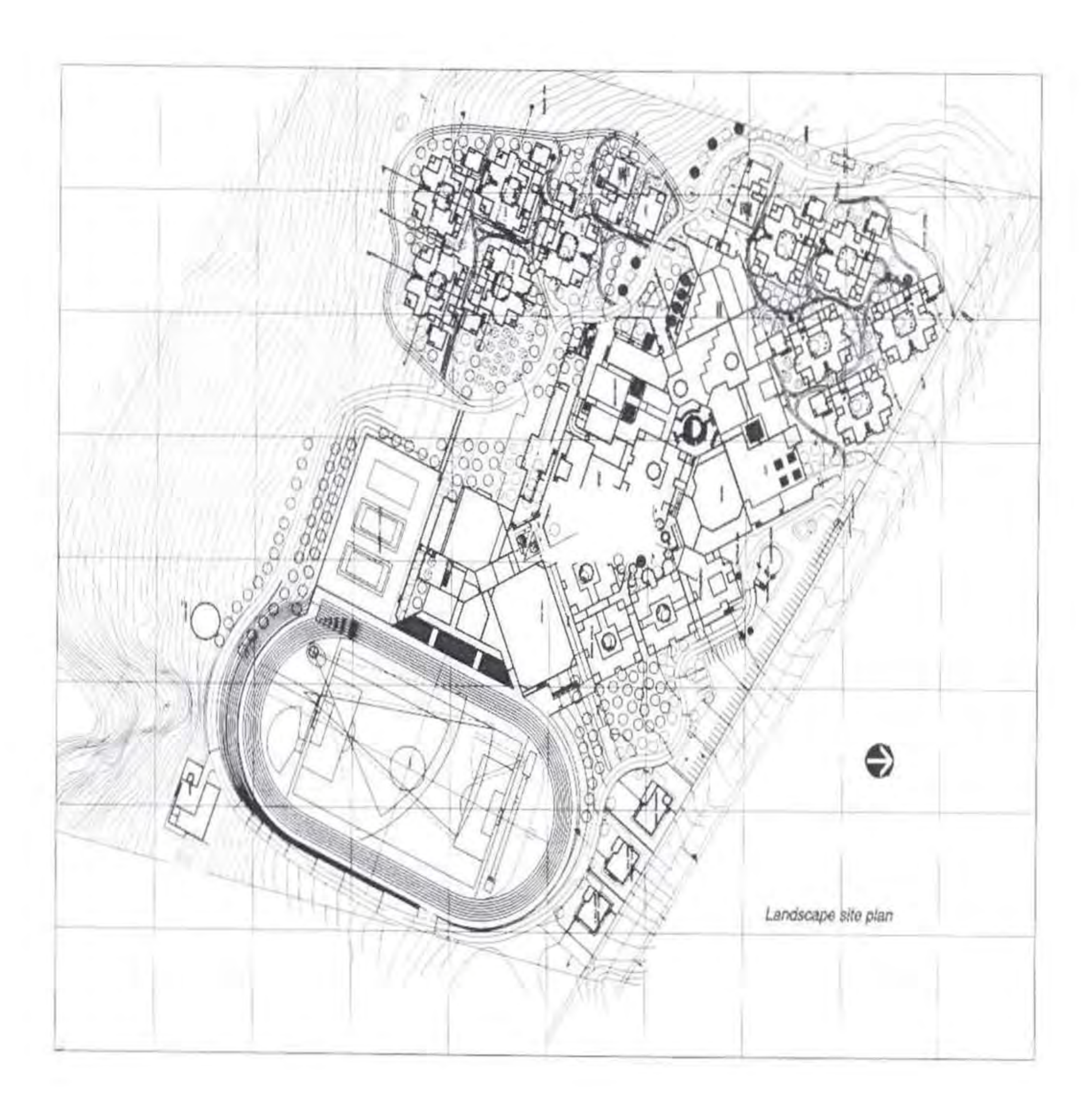
"I believe we are all on a journey of discovery, a voyage of the spirit.

We have a proud culture, and a glorious heritage.

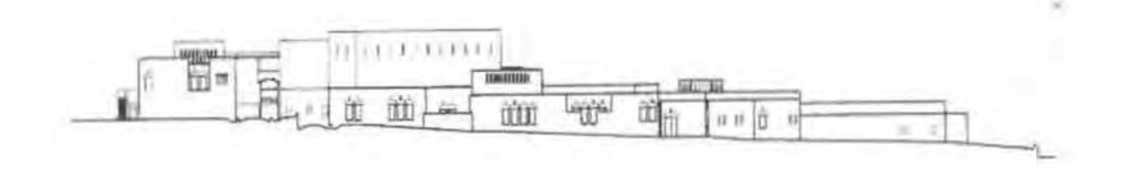
Let us follow its spirit, not only its form.

Let us distill the very best out of it, not the worst.

Let us not turn a nostalgia for the past into costly monuments for the near future."



Landscape site plan



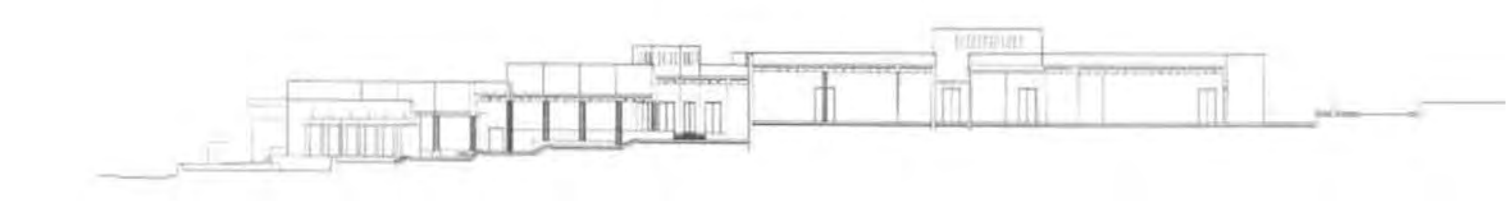
North-West elevation

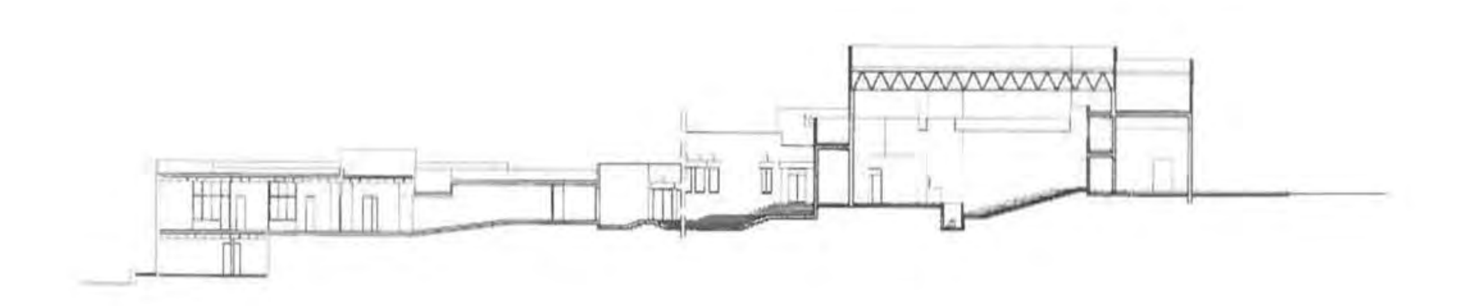


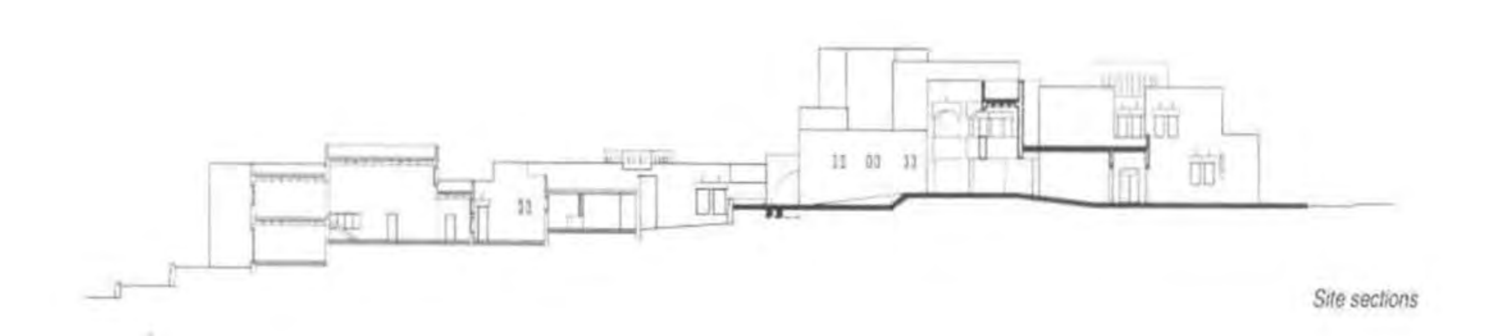
North-East elevation



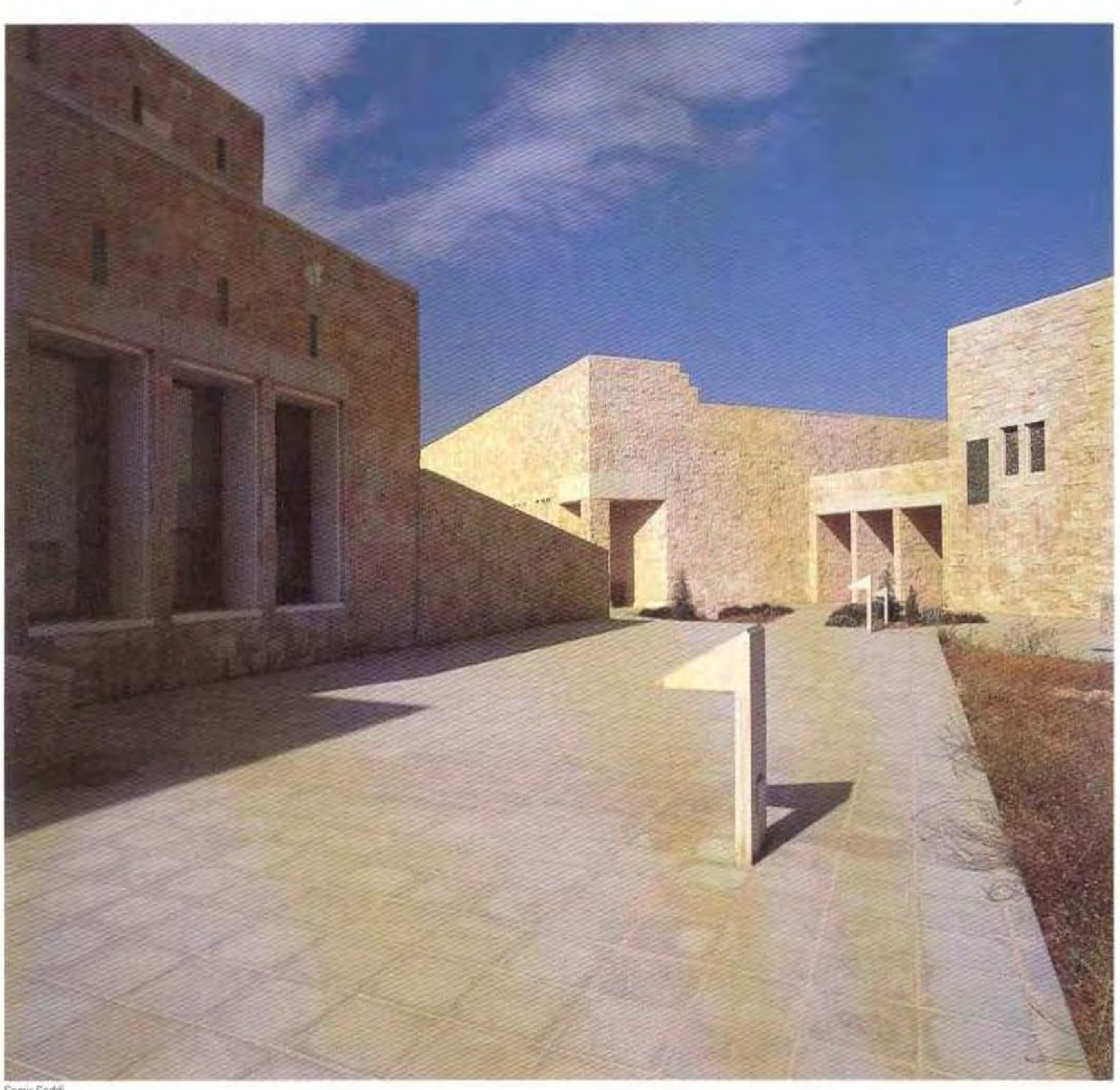
South elevation



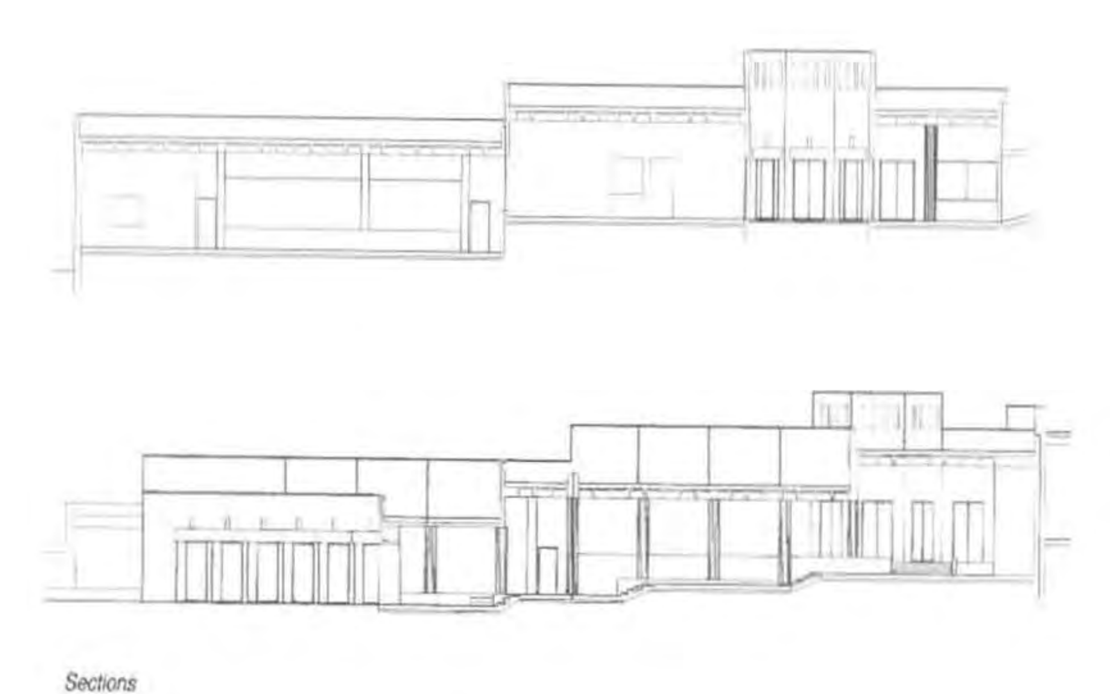




Site sections



Samir Saddi



Sections

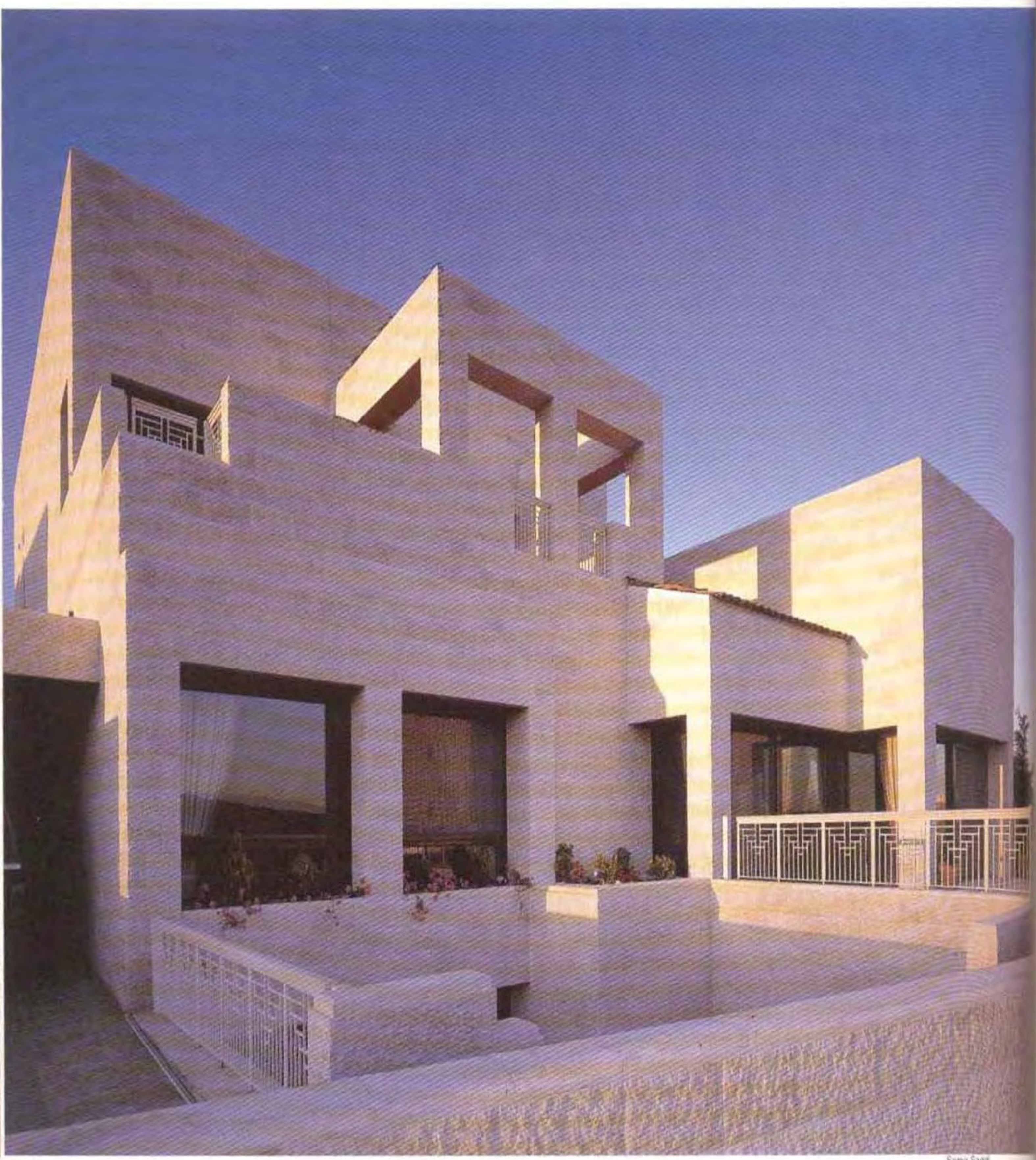




Phisical Education Plan



Samir Saddi



Samir Saddi

Villa Qattan

Amman, Jordan
1998

The villa is rare and intensely refined testimony, a sort of hymn, to the poetics of the habitat, to that mythical space where man, weary from his daily toil, rediscovers the affection of his dear ones.

The building lot, located in a newly developed elegant residential area, is rectangular with its short side along a street to its south, and slopes gently northwards. The site's features were utilized to their utmost to produce a design which includes a protected outdoor space to the northeast, while the interior is a multi-level play of spaces that overlook a central sky-lit space. This internal courtyard/plaza is, in practice, an extension of the exterior, completely clad and paved in that special golden stone typical of Jordan. Segmental arches spontaneously intersect the straight line, emphasizing the variations of light of different times of day.

The foyer, dining room and kitchen occupy the street level; the family rooms and winter garden are on the next level, opening onto the outdoor living space; two bedrooms are located on the third floor while another two, with their sitting room, are located on the uppermost level. The levels have a height variation of from one to two meters.

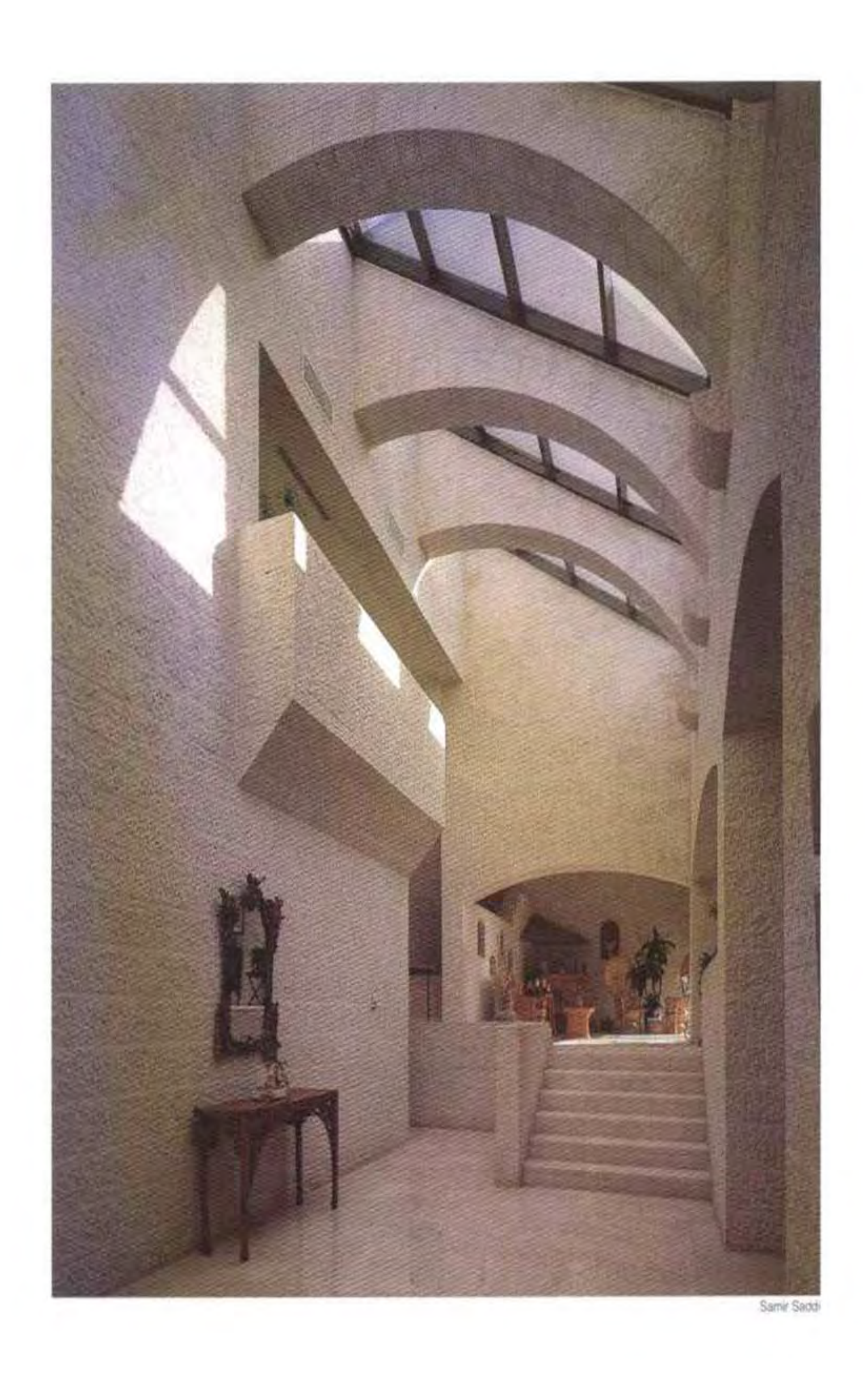
The design brings to mind Frank Lloyd Wright's celebrated comment when speaking of *The Natural House*, "Space must be seen as architecture, otherwise there is no architecture... growing from its place, emerging from the land and coming to light is in the nature of an organic building - the land itself has always been an essential part of a building. Only then we have the new ideal of an organic building in the highest degree, a self-asserting building like a tree in the middle of nature."



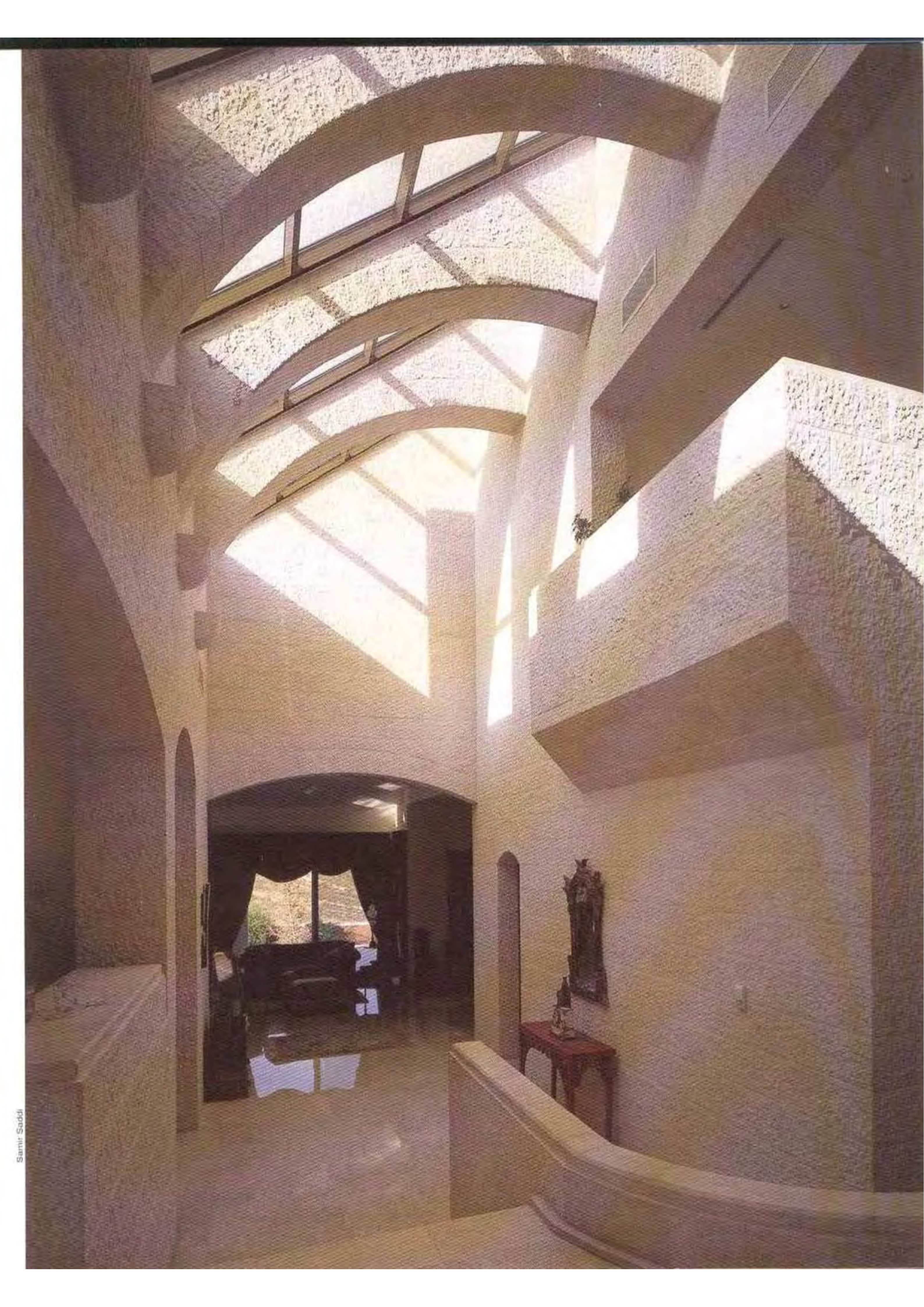
First floor plan



Sections



Samir Saddi



Samir Saddi



Samir Saddi

Dunes Club

Amman, Jordan
1998

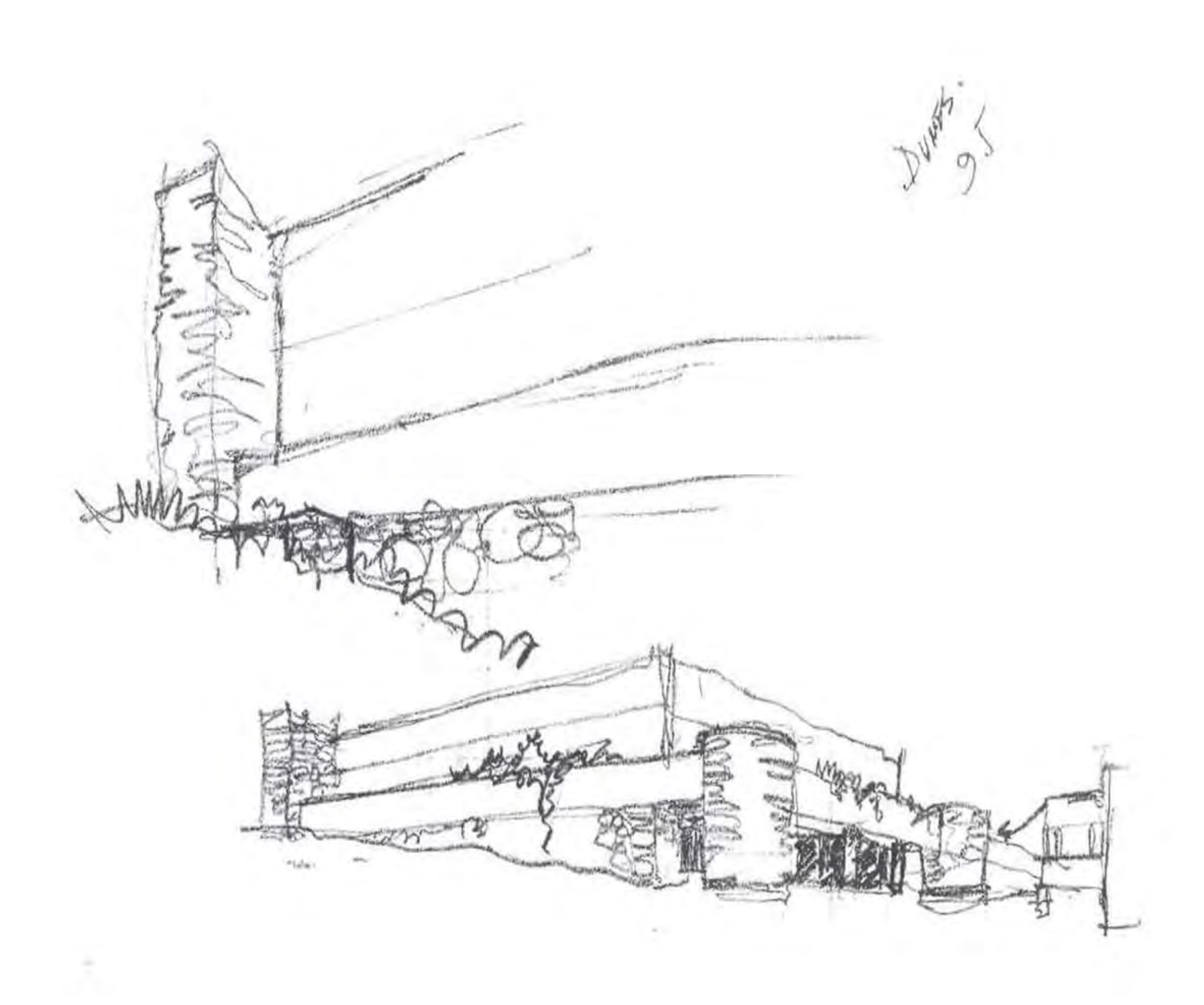
This complex is located on 105 dunums of land in Al-Yadoudeh next to Ghamadan Park along the road to the airport. It is made up of various sports facilities (gymnasium, fitness center, swimming pool, squash courts and dance studios), restaurant facilities (restaurant, coffee shop and pub), nursery, juniors' club, lounges, business center, shops, health and beauty center and a ballroom.

Outdoors there are tennis, basketball and volleyball courts, various play areas, a large swimming pool, garden equipped with barbeque grill, and lush green pergolas providing shade for the various activities.

A phrase of Tessenow's in *Hausbau und dergleighen* does better than some lengthy critical analysis to express the meaning of this architecture and the designer's commitment to its realization: "A love for the craftsman's touch embraces a love for ornamentation, it cannot reject it; in each of our works it is comparable to our whistling or humming; like when on a brick wall an ornament that we weren't looking for gives such special character to our humble work; like a poppy in the midst of a wheat field, a secondary smile in the flat field of utility."



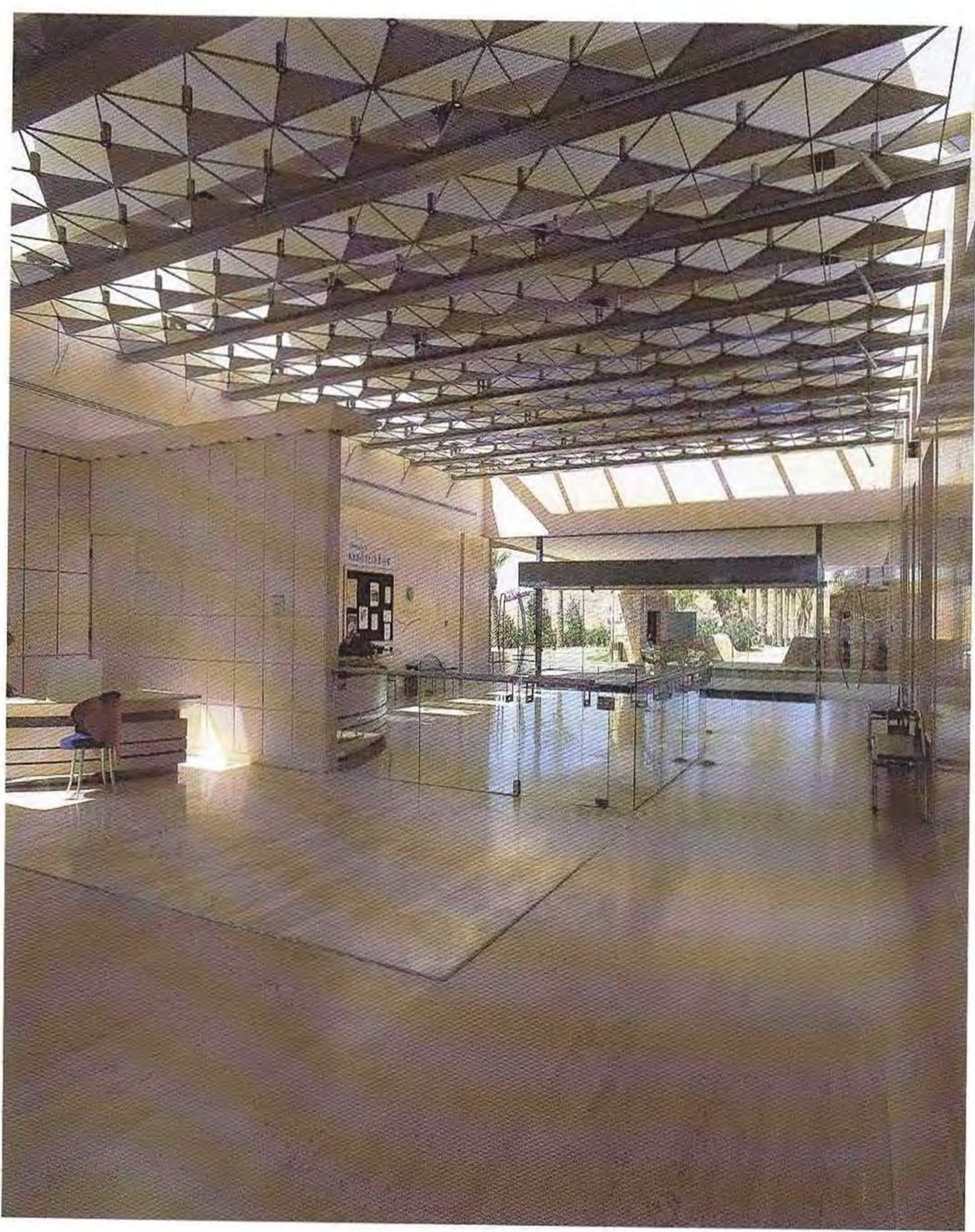
Site plan



Dunes Club, sketches



Samir Saddi



Samir Saddi



Samir Saddi



Samir Saddi



Samir Saddi



Samir Saddi



Samir Saddi

Holiday Inn Hotel

Amman, Jordan
1998

This five-star hotel contains 220 single and double rooms and one luxury suite.

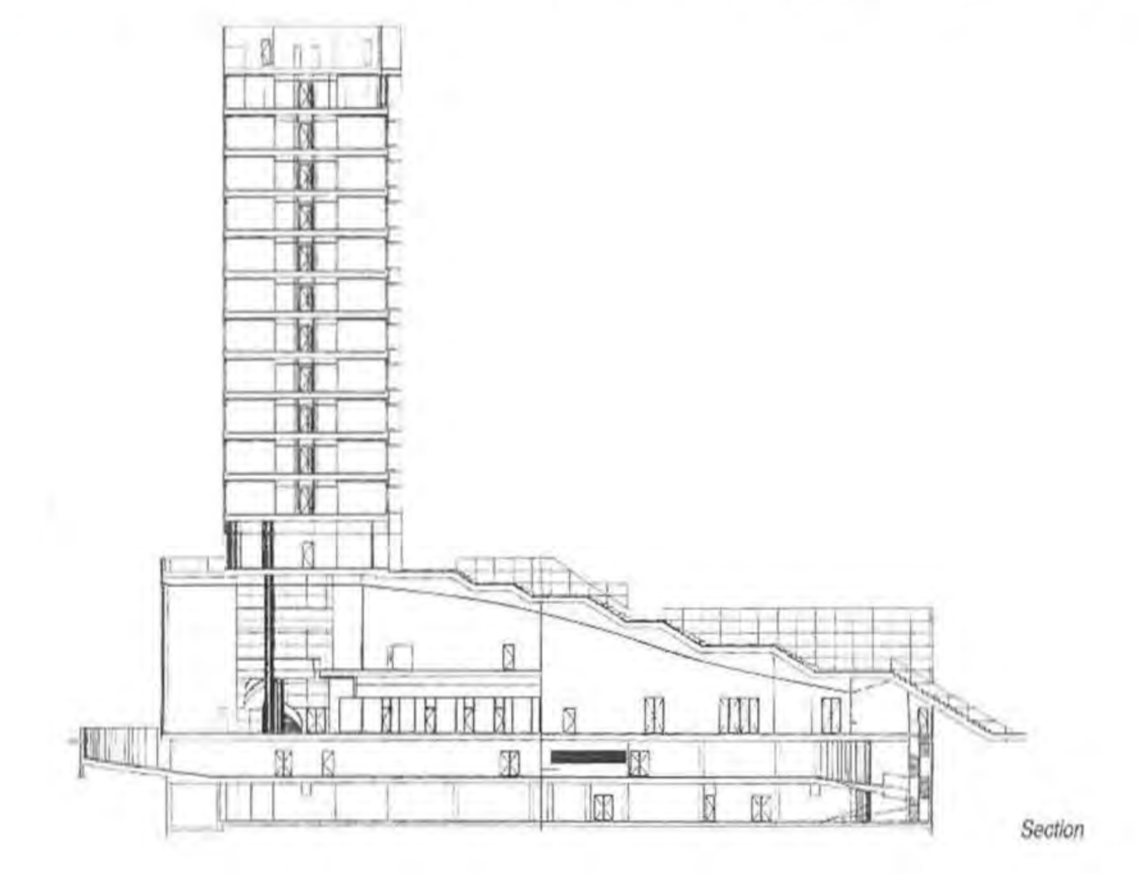
Designed as a tower situated atop a landscaped terrace of public spaces, the building offers a panoramic view not only to guests of the hotel but to anyone visiting the open public spaces.

The choice of this shape was to minimize land use and maximize views.

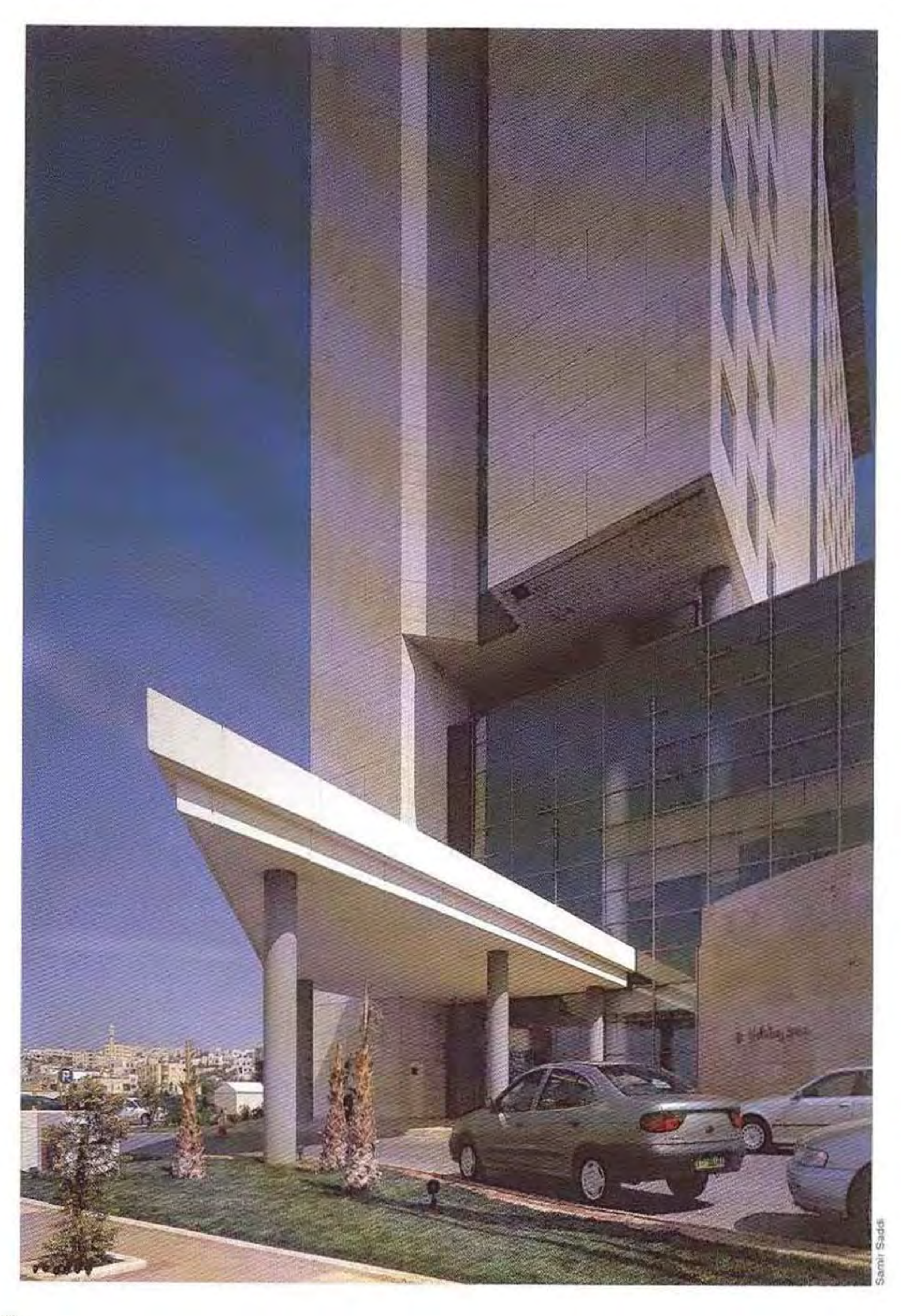
The public spaces are made up of a large ballroom, specialty restaurants, coffee shops and cocktail lounges, and a night club. There is also a fitness center and a landscaped swimming pool. Parking is underground.

Especially elegant is the grand reception lobby, a huge void that lends grace to all the spaces leading into it, and recalls the caravan courts and that play of sly glances and furtive exchanges.

The sensation we have in looking at this architecture bring to mind M. Yourcenar's well-known statement in *Hadrian's Memoires*, "Building means co-operating with the Earth, impressing the mark of man on a landscape that will be forever modified; it also means contributing to that slow transformation that is life itself."



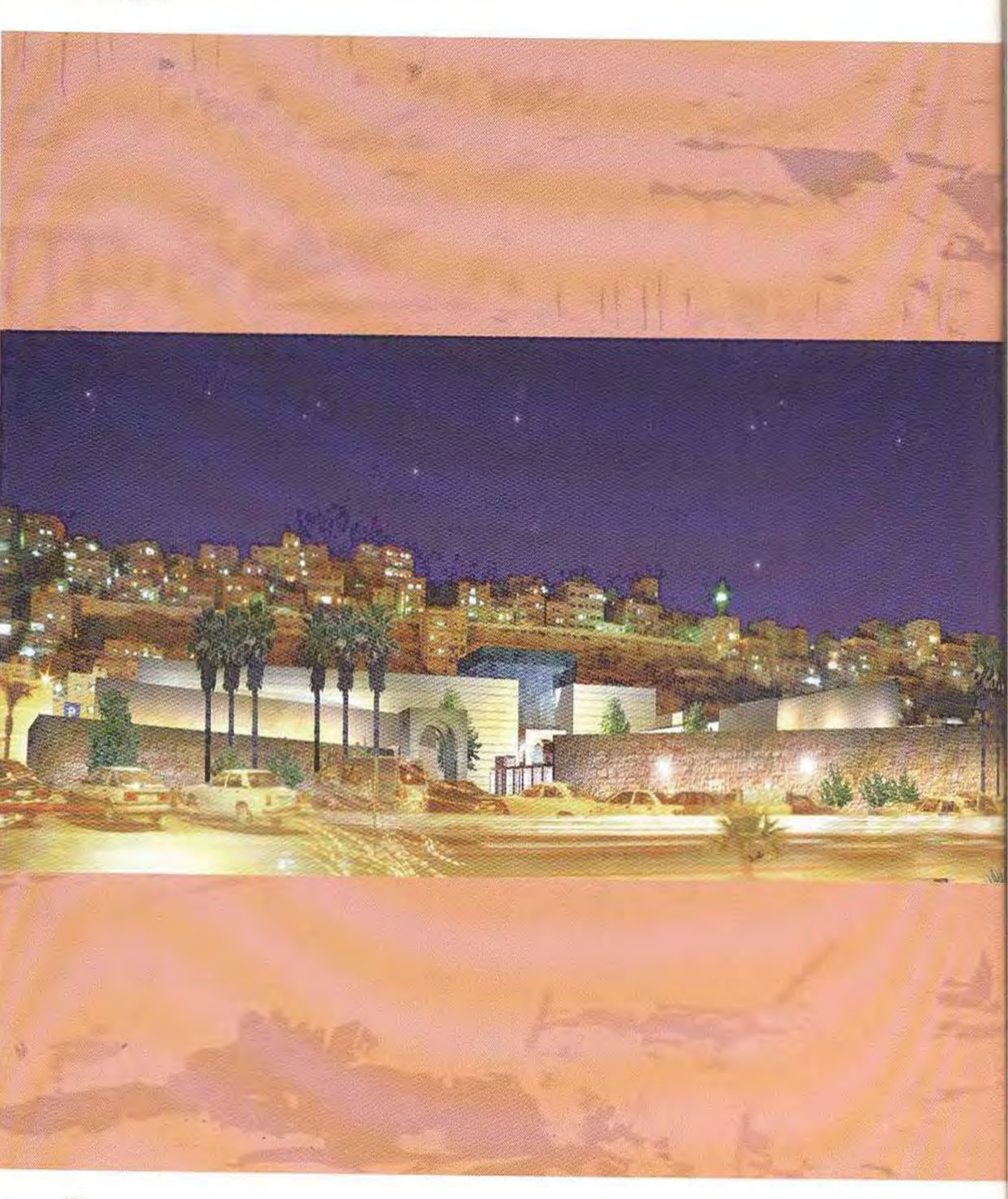
Section



Samir Saddi



Samir Saddi



Jordan National Museum

Amman, Jordan
2000

After a preliminary phase of study, and intense exchange with the National Museum Steering Committee, a Definitive Plan was drawn up in which the Museum becomes a sort of "Story Teller" employing all available artefacts and mediums. The Museum is to be not only a container of archaeological and ethnological objects, but one which places more emphasis on educational aspects, attracting the younger generation and establishing continuous cultural links between the civilizations of the past and the Jordan of our times. The displays serve not only as representations but also to clarify and illustrate the history of a nation.

Given that the separation of history from culture would not be in keeping with the objectives of the Museum, the Definitive Plan calls for the display of both historical and ethnological objects in a single space known as the Main Gallery. Beginning with the origins of life in Jordan, displays of historical and ethnological objects, placed alongside those of the royal collection, will describe the long history of a civilization with origins in the Stone Age as it looks towards the future.

Theme exhibitions will be set up in the Orientation Plaza located near the entrance to the Main Gallery; its functions and exhibition methods will be the same as those proposed by the Definitive Plan.

Visitor flow is by means of a circular route passing from the Stone Age to the Islamic Period on the ground floor of the Main Gallery, where there is also access to the Outdoor Gallery. The mezzanine decks of the Main Gallery are directly accessible from the ground floor by means of stairways at the center of the gallery. These decks host the royal and ethnological collections.

In keeping with suggestions by the Committee, the National Museum will combine the History Gallery and the Culture Gallery with the Main Gallery, while the spaces of the Outdoor Gallery will be widened to make visitor movement more fluid. In particular, a Main Courtyard has been designed which will facilitate entrance to both the Museum and the Restaurant. The courtyard may be employed not only as an intimate garden for a pleasant stroll but as a site for organizing open-air events that could generate additional revenue for the Museum.

The building has been designed so as to be integrated with the shapes of both the Fountain Plaza and the Mosque. The Museum has two exhibition galleries: the Main Exhibition Gallery and the Temporary Exhibition Gallery. The Main Gallery covers an area of 2800 sq.m. capable of accommodating the History, Culture, Royal Gallery and Orientation Hall displays. It is located on the ground floor and has mezzanine decks. The Temporary Exhibition Gallery is located on the second floor level with direct access from the ground floor level by means of an elevator. The Main Building also houses Seminar Rooms, while the restaurant and shops are located externally to allow separate access from the Museum and to generate additional income.

Research Laboratories, a Library and a Production Room are located on the first floor.

Site plan

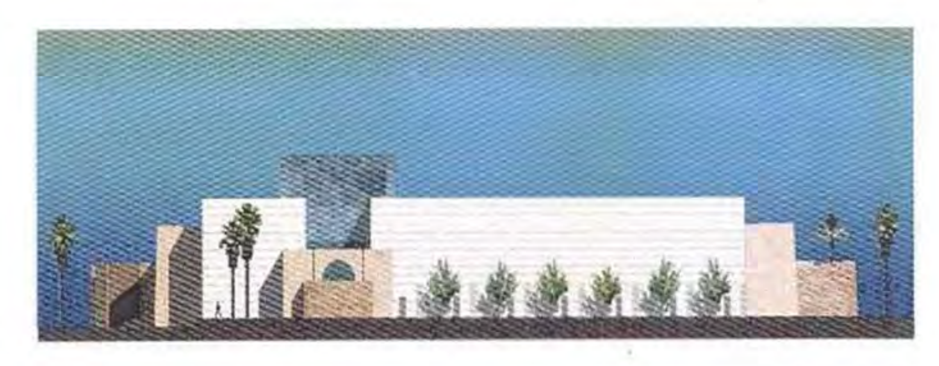


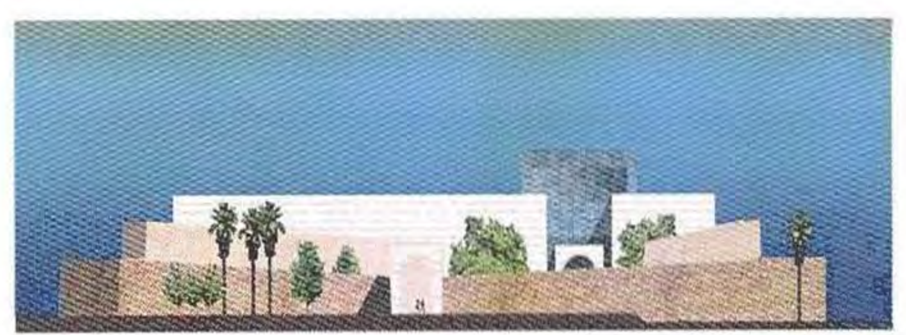
The Library is accessible both by stairways and the main and service elevators.

The building's facade is designed to reflect the national flavor and is integrated with other surrounding buildings. The materials of the facade symbolize the history of Jordan's journey through the ages from the ancient past towards the future. In particular, four materials of varying texture will be used, each with its own significance. The Lower Layer will be in thick, rough stone, symbolizing the use of stone in the East and the West; the Middle Layer in rough-cut stone symbolizing the Islamic Era; the Top Layer in smooth-cut stone symbolizing Modern Times; and the Tower is designed in glass to symbolize Jordan's future.

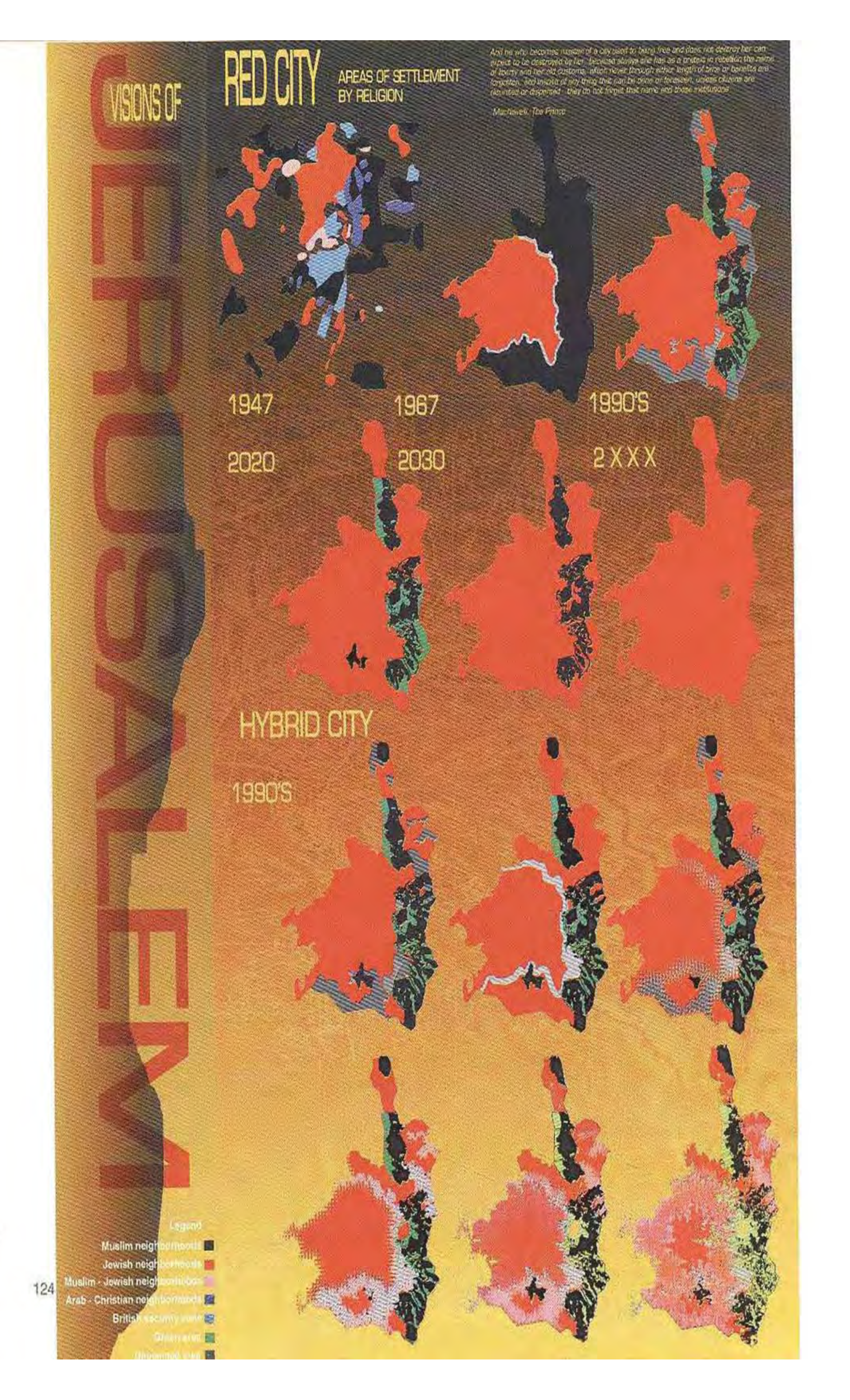








Elevations


VISIONS OF
JERUSALEM
RED CITY
AREAS OF SETTLEMENT
BY RELIGION
1947
1967
1990'S
2020
2030
2 X X X
HYBRID CITY
1990'S

Visions of Jerusalem

Jerusalem, Palestine
2000

The design springs from the awareness that Jerusalem is not just a museum of sacred places but primarily one in which to live, and a beautiful one too. The conflict has turned it instead into a place where God is manipulated and not worshipped. Only when the different peoples living there together get to know each other, and view their social and cultural differences as a source of enrichment and not as a way of justifying isolation and segregation, will the city regain its true nature. Even if Tukan's hypothesis was only a naive dream, it would be possible to build a city for all its citizens if pressure were brought to bear on the politicians. In this way God would be left out of it and Jerusalem would stop being used for political ends and become a home for all. Jerusalem should be ruled by mercy and not by politics.

The design proposal is identified with the lines of intensity that seem to follow what was the wall itself in 1967, as well as the strip of no-man's-land. Some expropriated lands separating the Jewish settlements from those of the Christians and Muslims will be developed, not as residential areas, but as areas that help people to come together, in order to maximize the areas of contact between the various, currently separated, communities. The combination of commercial activity with a central major transportation node may restore the concentricity of the city as a remedy for its present bi-polarity.

The project site is located on the flat peak of a hill near the railway station, along the Bethlehem Road; it is for the most part level and its northern section is triangular and measures about 75,000 sq.m. Its southern section is rectangular and measures about 90,000 sq.m. and falls between a predominantly Jewish area, known as Talpiot, and a predominantly Muslim and Christian one called Sur Baher, Abu Tor and Jabal Al Mukabber.

Jerusalem is a city made up of several hills on which traditional urban growth took place along the roads running towards the peaks. This was an organic growth, socially and economically intuitive, which visually resembles the branches and leaves of a tree.

By contrast, growth after 1948 and 1967 was more politically motivated, rapid and intense. It began on hilltops and grew downwards in a topographically serpentine pattern. The traditional urban pattern was not able to readily respond to the demands of growth as it sought to maintain the quality of the landscape.

The new pattern, while responding to politically motivated growth, has totally disregarded that same quality, and has become the symbol of forced demographic transformation. Its architecture has become part of the problem. The proposed project seeks to restore the landscape, becoming the continuation of the hills. Pedestrian paths slice into the hill symbolizing the desire to integrate the two communities. The striated structure is punctured by pools of light and greenery which make the land more friendly. The top of the hill is a green space accessible to pedestrians by means of a ramp that meanders uphill from a commercial area at the northwest corner of the rectangular portion of the site.

The entire composition attempts to underline environmental sustainability and human integration. In order to harmonize the site with its surroundings, the Bethlehem Road and another going east are partially underground so that pedestrians can cross safely, and to allow for a smooth traffic flow and parking. There is also space for a bus terminal.

Zones in between
No mans land

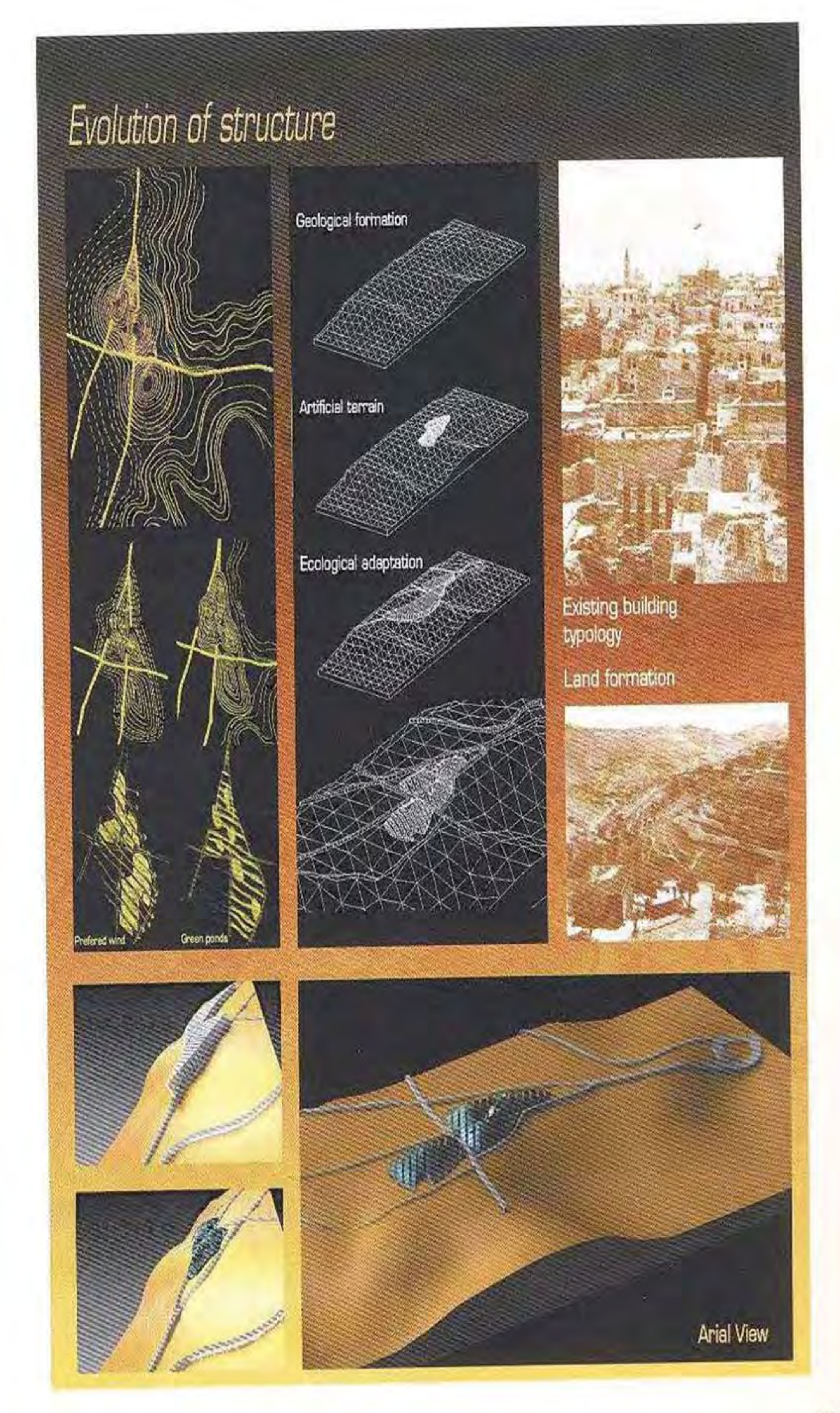
AERIAL VIEW

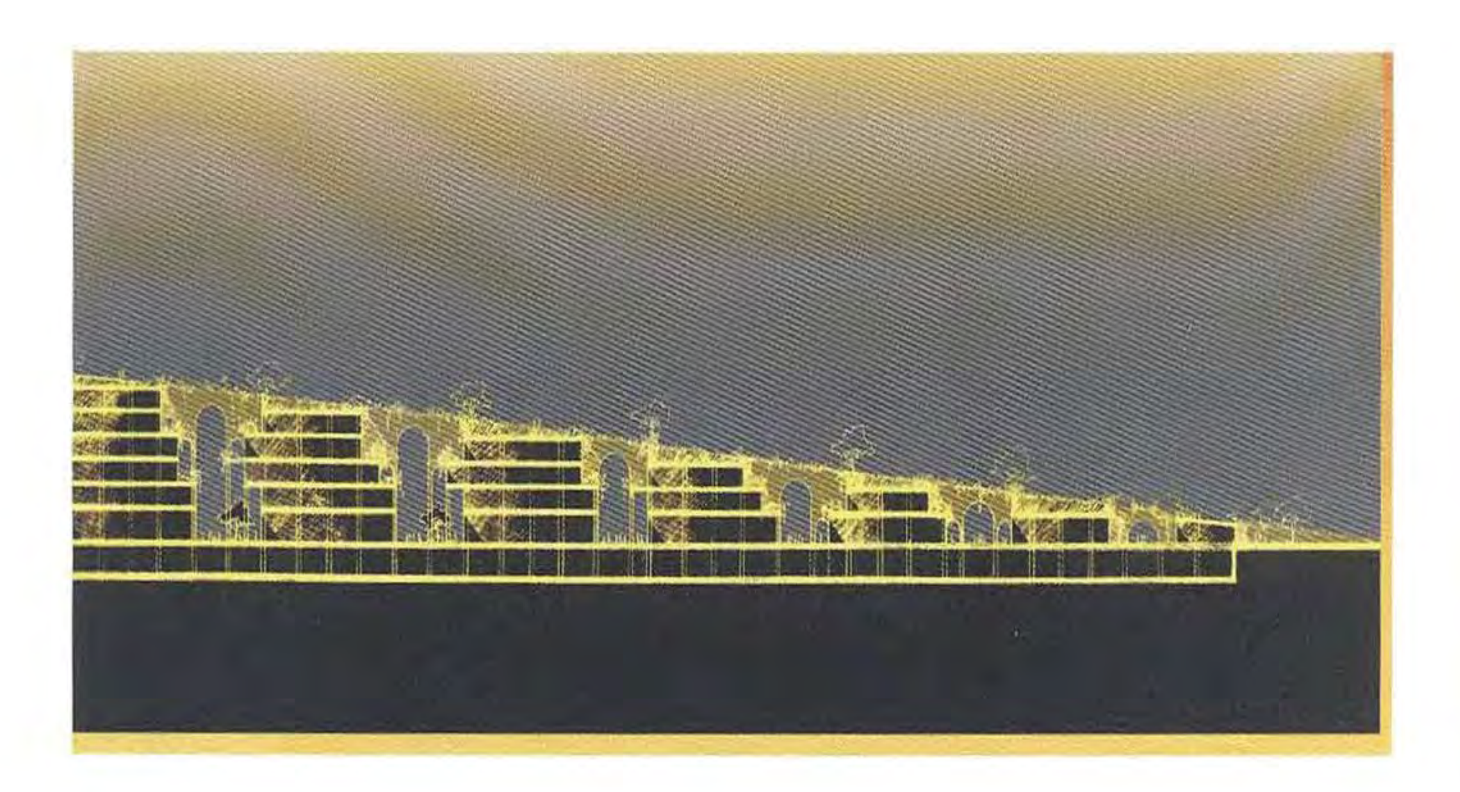
Zones of unresolved tension

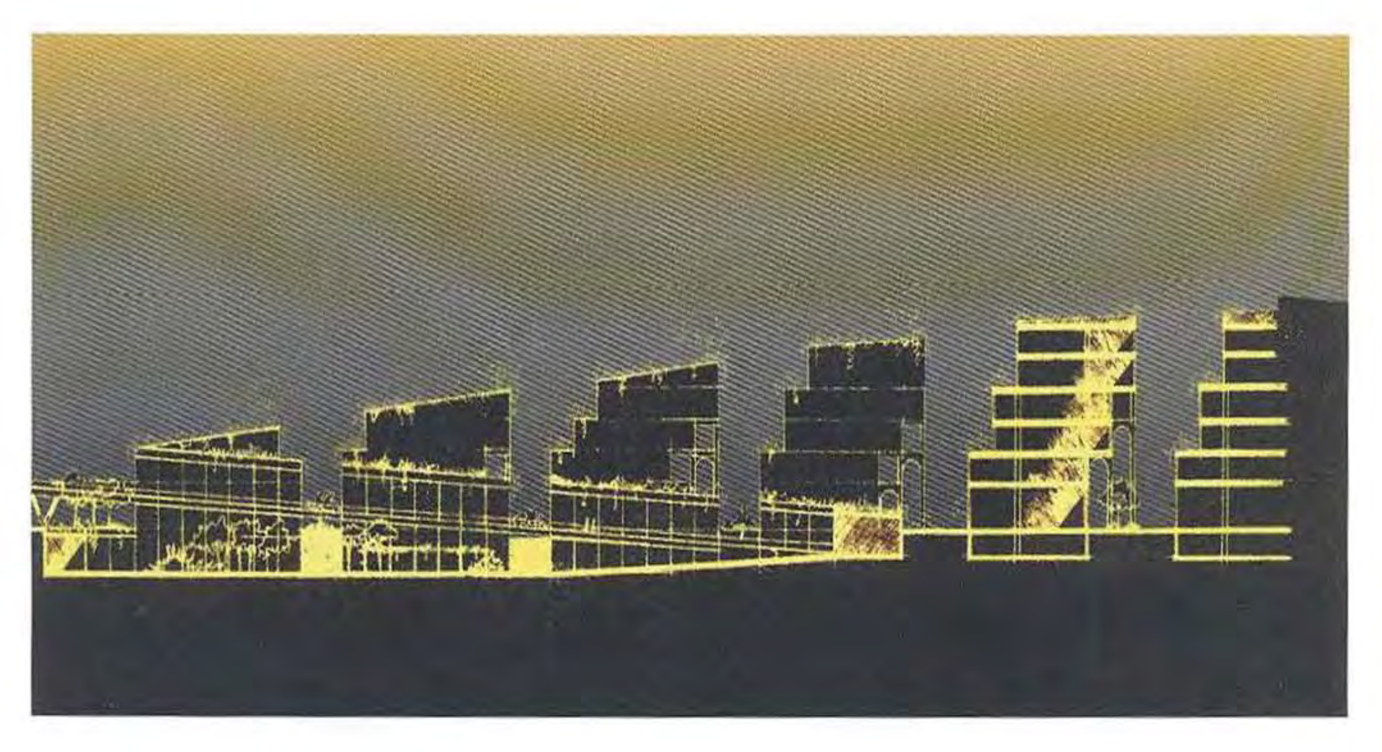
Green link

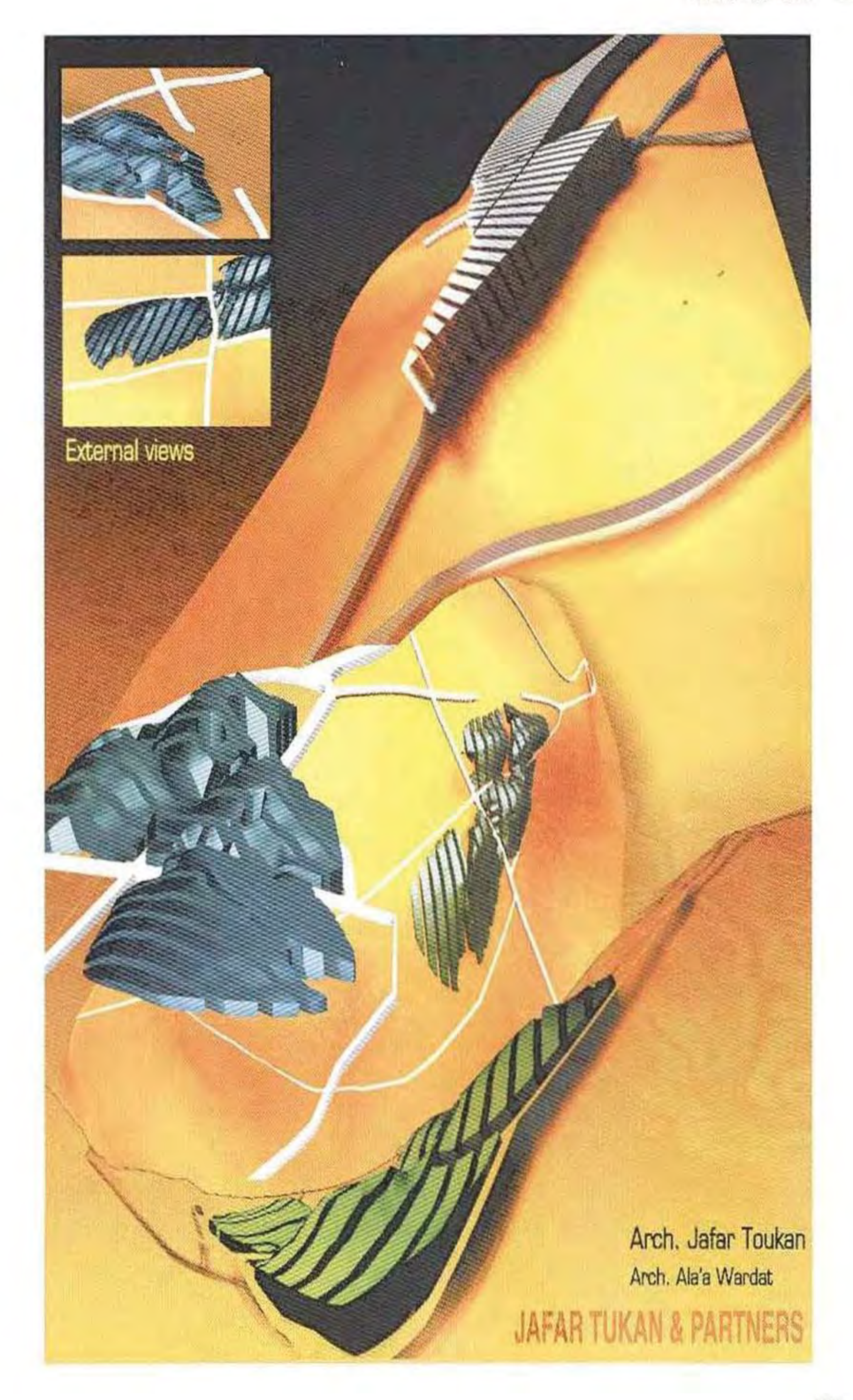
Zones of possible development




Evolution of structure
Geological formation
Artificial terrain
Ecological adaptation
Prefered wind
Green ponds
Existing building typology
Land formation
Arial View






External views
Arch. Jafar Toukan
Arch. Ala'a Wardat
JAFAR TUKAN & PARTNERS



Biography

Jafar Tukan was born in Jerusalem in 1938 and obtained a bachelors of Architectural Engineering (B.A.E) at the American University of Beirut (1960).

He joined the Ministry of Public Works, Government of Jordan, as a Design Architect in the building design section. The work included conceptual design and detailing of prototype schools, auditoriums, and touristic rest houses in Petra and Jerash.

From 1961 to 1968 he joined "Dar Al-Handasa, Consulting Engineers" as a Design Architect at the head office, in Beirut, Lebanon.

In 1968 he opened his private practice based in Beirut.

In 1973 he formed "Rais & Tukan, Architects" with head office in Beirut. The work covered design and supervision of several Government projects in U.A.E. and Saudi Arabia.

In 1976 he formed "Jafar Tukan & Partners, Architects & Engineers" that was expanded to cover a wide spectrum of projects of different categories such as Planning, Civic and Cultural, Educational, Hospitals and Medical Centers, Office and Commercial Buildings, Hotels and Tourism, Housing (Apartments, Villas and Public), Interiors, Landscaping, Factories and Warehouses.

He held several conferences and seminars in Jordan, UAE, Lebanon, Pakistan, at the Rockefeller Center, in Italy and in the Aga Khan Seminars on Islamic Architecture at M.I.T.

Further he is member of several associations including the Executive Board of the National Museum of Fine Arts, the Committee for Modern Buildings and Architectural Heritage, the Jordan Spanish Friendship Society, the Lebanese Jordanian Society and the Khalil Sakakini Cultural Center, Palestine.

He is also Visiting Lecturer of Architecture at Jordan University.

His buildings and design have earned him numerous awards, including the Palestine Award For Architecture (1999), the Al-Madina Award for Architecture (1997), the Jordan Engineers Association Award (1993), the Arab Architect Award for the year 1992, Architectural Project Award for the City of Amman (1988).

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Beirut, Lebanon

1980 Villa Rizk
Amman, Jordan

1982 Villa Salfiti
Amman, Jordan

1984 Villa Abu Rahmi
Amman, Jordan

1984 Villa Kazimi
Amman, Jordan

1986 Villa Chalabi
Amman, Jordan

1986 Masood Tower
Abu-Dhabi, U.A.E.

1987 ACDIMA
Amman, Jordan

1990 SOS Children's Village
Aqaba, Jordan

1991 Arab Insurance Company
Amman, Jordan

1996 ADNOC-FOD Building
Abu-Dhabi, U.A.E.

1996 Amman City Hall
Amman, Jordan
with Shubeilat,
Badran Associates - Amman

1997 Jordan Tower
Amman, Jordan

1997 Bank of Jordan
Amman, Jordan

1998 Holiday Inn Hotel
Amman, Jordan
with Adil Lari-Vienna

1998 Villa Qattan
Amman, Jordan

1998 The Jubilee School
Amman, Jordan

1998 Dunes Club
Amman, Jordan

2000 Visions of Jerusalem
Jerusalem, Palestine

2000 Zaatara Mosque
Amman, Jordan

2000 Jordan National Museum
Amman, Jordan
with Pacific Consultans Int. and
Yamashita Sekkei - Tokyo

Ali Abu Ghanimeh was born in Irbid, Jordan, in 1957. Graduated from the Faculty of Architecture of Rome, he attended a specialization course of Theory of Architecture and the doctor's degree of History of Architecture in Rome. At present he teaches History of Architecture at the University of Amman, further he holds conferences and seminaries in several arab and european Academies and Universities. He is author of several publications including: *Paolo Portoghesi*, Al-Dustur Press, Amman 1991, the essay in the catalogue *Lo spazio sacro nella modernità*, Biennale of Venice 1992, *La moschea tra tradizione e innovazione, L'architettura islamica in Sicilia*, 1993, *La rappresentazione nell'architettura giordana*, Rome 1999.

Mario Pisani was born in Rome in 1947. Architectural historian and critic, he is associate professor at the Faculty of Architecture the 2nd University of Naples, he teaches at the Academy of Fine Arts "Pietro Vannucci" in Perugia and is visiting professor at the Faculty of Architecture at Msida, Malta. Further he holds conferences and seminaries in several italian and foreign Universities (Florence, Rome, Naples, Salerno, Reggio Calabria, Palermo, Amman). He has been contributor of the C.N.R and of the Biennale of Venice and also author of several books including: *Paolo Portoghesi. Opere e progetti*, Electa, Milan 1989, *Architecture Studio. Rites de Passages*, Wordsearch Publishing, London - Carte Segrete, Rome 1995, *Le architetture di Armando Brasini*, Officina Edizioni, Rome 1996, *Paolo Luccioni architetture*, Officina Edizioni, Rome 1999.